



Opening the Way

Our strategic ambition for the next decade

From our Chair and Chief Executive

On behalf of the Board of Trustees we are delighted to set out the Ramblers' ambitions for the future, where walking outdoors in nature is opened up to many more people, and society benefits from the improvements to health and wellbeing that this will bring.

We are all facing a wide range of enduring social and economic challenges that are impacting the nation's health and wellbeing. It is well known that walking can be transformative, and recent research¹ has shown that usage of the path network adds over 3,000 healthy years of life to the nation, worth an estimated wellbeing value of £2 billion in England and Wales: that's the cost of 8.5 million ambulance call outs or nearly 10 million outpatient procedures.

However, it is also true that the communities that would benefit most from greater access to nature are missing out. The Ramblers has a key role to play in tackling the issues that have led to this inequity by focusing our efforts even more on increasing the participation of those who have the least access, and face the most barriers, to walking outdoors in nature.

The history and heritage of the Ramblers provides a springboard to realise our future ambitions. At our core is the drive to improve provision, quality, and information, on access, paths and rights of way, and we're deeply committed to continuing that: it's a critical foundation.

We also want to improve people's confidence and knowledge to walk outdoors, and to increase support for the Ramblers' charitable cause, so that the benefits of walking can be felt more widely and long into the future.

The Ramblers is already doing much of this work through the amazing efforts of its thousands of loyal members and volunteers who lead walks, protect and maintain footpaths, and influence improvements to public access, and through programmes that the charity delivers in partnership with others, such as Ramblers' Wellbeing Walks and the Out There Award. But we need to do more.

The Board of Trustees' ambition is for the Ramblers to support more of these impactful activities in the future, through the collective efforts of members, volunteers, staff and partners, where we collaborate, influence, and work towards the same charitable purpose, especially with communities that can benefit the most.

The Ramblers' refreshed strategic plan has been developed over a period of nearly two years; it is based on extensive research and insight and has been shaped by a wide range of people. We would like to thank all the members, volunteers, partners, supporters, and individuals who have taken the time to share their thoughts and ideas.

The coming years will be an exciting time for the Ramblers as together we look forward to playing our part in creating a healthier and more equitable, diverse, and inclusive society.

Rebecca Dawson, Chair of Trustees
Ross Maloney, Chief Executive

¹ 'Who has a public right of way? An analysis of provision and inequity in England and Wales', New Economics Foundation, September 2023

The Ramblers' Strategic Plan on a Page

Our ambitions:

Vision: A future where anyone can enjoy walking outdoors

Purpose: The Ramblers campaigns for access to the outdoors and creates walking opportunities for all

Impact: Equitable access for all communities in England, Scotland and Wales to walk outdoors

Values: We'll be guided in our decision making and daily work by being:

Inclusive

Inspiring

Empowering

Responsible

Outcomes: Over the next ten years, we'll strive to achieve these four outcomes:

Outcome 1: Improved **provision**, quality and information on access, paths and rights of way

Impact measure (year 1): Number of barriers removed (physical and legal)

Outcome 2: Improved **confidence** and knowledge to walk outdoors

Impact measure (year 1): Number of people supported to go walking

Outcome 3: Improved **participation** of communities that have the least access and most barriers to the outdoors

Impact measure (year 1): Number of activities in priority communities

Outcome 4: Improved **support** for The Ramblers' charitable cause

Impact measures (year 1): Number of new supporters

Enablers: Our use of resources and our activities will be guided by these enabling strategies:

Sustainable income and investment

Targeted advocacy, policy and public affairs

Streamlined partnerships, programmes and networks

Data, insight and digital innovation

A diverse body of staff, trustees, members, supporters, and volunteers

Fit for purpose governance and operating models

The values that guide us in our daily work



Stronger and bolder ambitions

Since 1935, the Ramblers has been doing everything it can to make sure everyone everywhere can enjoy walking in nature. We've helped open up vast swathes of the countryside which were previously out of bounds, and we made sure laws were amended and added to keep it that way.

The Ramblers has a loyal membership and thousands of dedicated volunteers who are doing brilliant work in campaigning, keeping rights of way open and maintaining footpaths. In addition, members and volunteers guide over 50,000 group walks every year - short and long, easy and strenuous - and reach out to a wide range of audiences. We want this to continue, and we want more people to experience the benefits.

Research demonstrates there are still significant inequities in access to the countryside. Walking has well-known health and wellbeing benefits, especially walking in green spaces and nature, but these benefits are only available to those individuals who can access these spaces. Addressing this inequity is the most pressing concern for the outdoor sector and the Ramblers has a key part to play alongside partners.

The pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, cuts to local authority funding, and pressures on the NHS have only accentuated the fault lines that result in some people becoming even more marginalised. As a charity that is powered by members and volunteers in communities, we are particularly well-placed to respond to these challenges by helping to strengthen community cohesion and resilience.

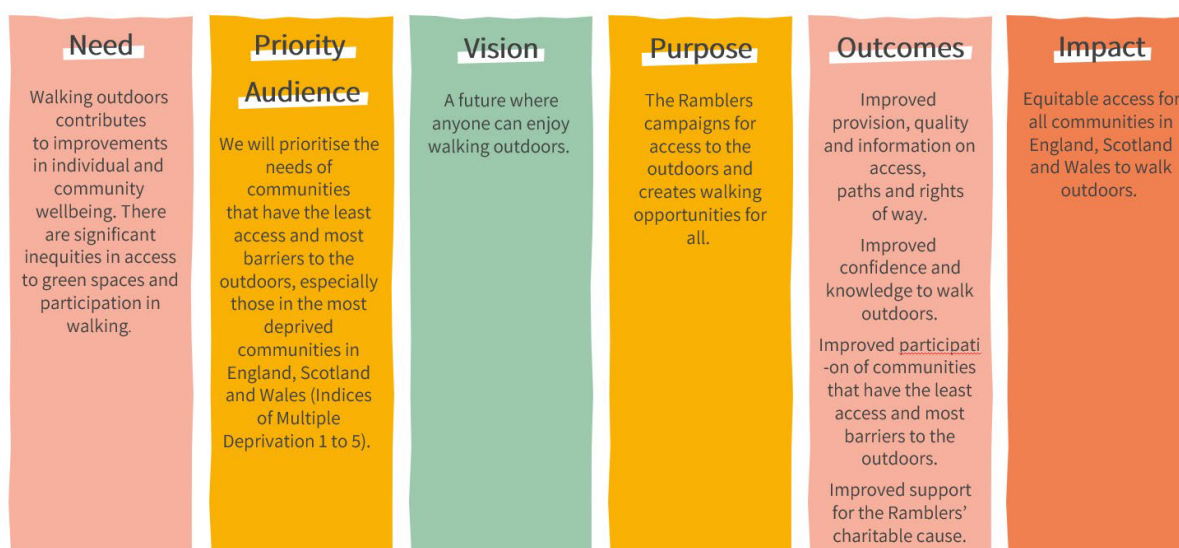
That's why we believe we must now sharpen our focus on our charitable purpose by bringing our unique public benefits to those with the least access and the most barriers to walking outdoors in nature. This means that as well as providing more opportunities for walking we

will recognise the specific circumstances of different people and communities, and tailor our support to overcome the barriers that prevent their participation.

The Ramblers envisions a future where anyone can enjoy walking outdoors, and the long-term impact we want to achieve - working with members, volunteers, supporters, partners, funders and local communities - is equitable access for all people in England, Scotland and Wales to walk outdoors in nature.

Our 'Foundations for impact'

Our foundations for impact set the framework for our strategy:



Our four outcomes

Our refreshed strategic plan has four target outcomes at its heart:

1. Improved **provision**, quality and information on access, paths and rights of way.
2. Improved **confidence** and knowledge to walk outdoors.
3. Improved **participation** of communities that have the least access and the most barriers to the outdoors.
4. Improved **support** for the Ramblers' charitable cause.

We'll align our resources behind activities that will drive achievement of these outcomes and develop an impact measurement framework to gauge how effectively we are achieving our desired outcomes and laying the foundations for long term impact. In the first year, our impact framework will focus on developing consistent measures and data collection systems and gathering baseline data.

We'll adopt a test and learn approach and adapt our activities as we go to ensure we're making the most impact we can, along with our supporters and partners, on our long-term goal of equitable access for all people in England, Scotland and Wales to walk outdoors.

Outcome 1 – Improved provision, quality and information on access, paths and rights of way

- We'll continue to work with members, volunteers and partners to improve provision and remove barriers to the outdoors, enabling more people to enjoy walking and access to nature through our programmes and campaigns. In addition, we'll place a growing emphasis on community or place-based programmes that bring together our resources and expertise with the needs and input of local communities in priority locations. For example, working with communities in deprived areas (Indices of Multiple Deprivation 1 to 5), to improve local paths, building on the success of our Paths to Wellbeing project.

How we'll measure our impact

- In year one, we'll measure our impact by recording the number of obstacles we remove, including physical clearance and infrastructure improvements, as well as successful legal challenges and new paths being opened.

Discovering and recording Stoke-on-Trent's paths

Since 2015, Ramblers' volunteers in Stoke-on-Trent have been working with the local council to uncover the network of public rights of way across the city. This project saw a team of Ramblers' volunteers, led by former Area Footpath Secretary Harry Scott, fan out across the city to walk and record the condition of hundreds of paths.

As a result of this work, a total of 104 miles of previously unrecorded public rights of way were added to the definitive map, increasing the recorded network by an amazing 350%. In the words of Staffordshire Area Secretary, Peter Matthews, who was involved in this work:

"Stoke-on-Trent has a wonderful network of paths, offering a real variety of walking experiences, both urban and more rural. By discovering and recording this network, it will be there for everyone to enjoy, now and for many years into the future. I hope that it encourages more people to explore more of our local area."

This fantastic work in Stoke-on-Trent is part of the thousands of hours a year that our volunteers put into our paths. Whether out walking the paths and reporting issues; scrutinising potential changes to the network; reclaiming lost historical paths by delving into the archives; or replacing stiles for gates or cutting back vegetation, Ramblers' volunteers give up their time to make sure our paths remain open, clear, and well maintained for everyone to enjoy.

Outcome 2 – Improved confidence and knowledge to walk outdoors

- We'll make our walk leader advice and training more relevant and more easily accessible to communities across England, Scotland and Wales, giving more people the skills and confidence to go walking. This will include exploring new ways to support priority communities, through engagement and collaboration, as well as extending impactful programmes like Ramblers Wellbeing Walks (supporting people with health conditions) and the Out There Award (helping young adults in urban areas).

How we'll measure our impact

- In year one, we'll measure our impact by recording the number of people supported to go walking, either by taking part in a walk or by accessing information and training. We'll also measure increases in people's self-reported confidence to walk outdoors.

Dee's story: Walk leader for Wisbech Ramblers Wellbeing Walk, which is supported by the Ramblers and Active Fenland

Before she started walking, Dee was 17 stone and housebound. She would drive her children to school in the morning but spent most of her days isolated at home.

Through educating herself about healthy eating, and getting into walking, she has become much happier and healthier. She is now using her experience to inspire others as a walk leader for Ramblers Wellbeing Walks. This is her story.

"I had been following Active Fenland for a while and I saw a post about setting up a Ramblers Wellbeing Walk. I thought it was a great idea. It's like a social club but you're walking as well.

Then I saw they were looking for walk leaders which I thought was a fantastic opportunity.

I was a bit hesitant because I had been housebound for so long - where would I take people?

I emailed Active Fenland and said I would love to try being a walk leader if there was support available. That's how it all started. We planned it and then we started advertising it. I get 20 to 25 people that come in each week, so it's just grown from there. Everybody's really friendly. As soon as a new person comes along, everyone huddles around them, they're really lovely people. I couldn't ask for a better group.

Walking and leading walks has given me the confidence that I had before I gained so much weight. It's opened up different avenues for me as well. My passion was always to get people active."

Outcome 3 – Improved participation of communities that have the least access and most barriers to the outdoors

- We'll be purposeful in prioritising participation of those communities facing the greatest barriers to walking outdoors in nature when developing campaigns and programmes. We will actively engage, listen, and learn from priority communities, and work with them to develop new products or approaches to supporting people walking outdoors. And we'll double down on our efforts to become a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive charity.

How we'll measure our impact

- In year one, we'll measure our impact by mapping all our activities by postcode to understand how far we are reaching our priority communities.

Ramblers' walks for asylum seekers

From Box Hill's steep chalk slopes to the fir-covered range leading up Leith Hill, Surrey is a wonderful place to walk. And since 1980, the Mole Valley Ramblers have been leading walks for a 400-strong community of walkers through this wonderful landscape.

But just 15 miles away, in a repurposed hotel near Gatwick, experiencing the beauty of the Surrey Hills seemed impossible. Home to 200 men seeking asylum, the hotel is isolated, cut off from public transport. With no certainty as to what the future would hold, these men found themselves living in small, confined spaces, cut off from the wider world. Exercise was largely impossible, so too was spending any time outdoors.

So, after being approached by a local police officer about the possibility of scheduling walks, the Mole Valley Ramblers decided to do something about it. They began by plotting routes that began at the front door of the hotel. And soon, they held their first walk.

The benefit was immediate. Everyone began to relax. The men started chatting amongst themselves, with many wanting to practise their English. The whole mood lifted. And as the walks continued, the connections between the walkers grew stronger. Despite not sharing a language and coming from different cultures and countries across the globe, they now had the chance to get out and connect with each other and the natural world that surrounded them.

"It is the most beautiful feeling in the world every time you walk with them and explore the beautiful countryside and its nature." - Jai, asylum seeker.

Outcome 4 – Improved support for the Ramblers' charitable cause

- We'll sharpen our focus on our unique public benefit as a charity. By demonstrating the impact of our work through the strength of our actions and via our communications, we will change and revitalise perceptions of the Ramblers. In turn, this will help inspire new partners, communities, and generations of walkers to support us in our ambition to create a future where anyone can enjoy walking outdoors in nature. Increased support for our cause will help our financial resilience as a charity, ensuring our valuable impact can thrive for years to come.

How we'll measure our impact

- In year one, we'll measure our impact by the number of new supporters (of all types including members, volunteers, donors, partners etc).

Let's walk together

In 2022, we ran a six-month media partnership campaign to raise awareness of the Ramblers. The campaign called 'Let's Walk Together' was delivered in partnership with a leading marketing agency and the TV presenter and farmer Jimmy Doherty as the figurehead. We benefitted from six months of editorial features and advertising in a range of printed magazines and their associated digital channels, including BBC Countryfile, BBC Good Food, Delicious, Olive, BBC Wildlife and BBC Gardeners' World.

The campaign reached 14 million people and the campaign video featuring Jimmy Doherty, Ramblers' staff, and volunteers was viewed 2.7m times with 187,000 people visiting the website to find out more. Not only did it drive new members, website visitors and followers, the campaign had a significant impact on awareness of the Ramblers and improved people's understanding of our work to protect and enhance the walking network. It demonstrably made people feel more positive about the Ramblers and led to a 45% improvement in interest in the Ramblers and what we do.

Enablers

These are the strategic intentions, or enabling strategies, that will guide our use of resources and determine the activities we'll do to drive delivery of our strategic outcomes:

Sustainable income and investment

We will:

- prioritise investment of our resources in activities of greatest impact
- evolve our membership model to a broader supporter model, enabling us to become a charity more open to anyone who would like to support our work
- diversify and grow our sources of income through our charitable impact and public benefit to ensure financial sustainability.

Targeted advocacy, policy, and public affairs

We will:

- review our advocacy priorities to ensure we're focused on addressing the barriers to walking outdoors in nature
- optimise our public affairs activity to grow our influence with government and other key stakeholders.

Streamlined partnerships, programmes, and networks

We will:

- enable a thriving network of local groups and areas
- act as a convenor of organisations and individuals working to enable more people to experience the benefits of walking outdoors in nature
- listen and learn from others, particularly communities facing the most barriers to walking outdoors in nature.

Data, insight, and digital innovation

We will:

- provide digital tools that make it easier for members, volunteers, supporters, partners and staff to enable more people to experience the benefits of walking outdoors
- harness the power of our data to drive decision-making and optimise the impact of our activities.

A diverse body of staff, trustees, members, supporters, and volunteers

We will:

- create an inclusive culture where everyone is empowered to contribute to the success of the Ramblers
- stand up for what we believe in, including becoming an anti-racist charity and challenging injustice where we see it.

Fit for purpose governance and operating models

We will:

- review our governance and operating models, optimising them, and ensuring we're making the best use of our people and financial resources.

[To be incorporated into final design.]

Angelina's story: Out There Award – Edinburgh

“From a young age I've loved nature and the outdoors. However, the outdoors was often not accessible to me. I grew up in a single parent household where my parent was unable to work due to ill health and we did not have a car. This created many barriers for me, and this is where the Out There Award comes in.

When I first saw the award, it was too good to be true – free outdoor and navigation skills in an accessible location with resources and supplies as you needed. I was apprehensive but when I arrived on the day it was all unbelievably real.

The central Edinburgh location was excellent, with good public transport access, but in an area which allowed us to learn a lot of navigation skills.

The skills and knowledge we learned involved a lot of active learning where we would all take turns at doing the navigation skills and they were not made unnecessarily complex. This way of learning catered to so many levels and abilities, and I felt so much more confident afterwards.

Additionally, community seemed to be a very big part of the award and having volunteers from previous award attend reinforced this.

I think the structure and planning of the award really focused on accessibility, whether that was in the way the teaching was delivered, the location, supplying and providing equipment to keep, the attitude of openness fostered by Sam and the network of ramblers.

The whole award was extremely rewarding and managed to tackle all the barriers that prevented me getting outdoors and has empowered me to safely get into nature which has so many benefits for me physically and mentally.”

[To be incorporated into final design.]

Paths to Wellbeing – transforming lives and landscapes across Wales

Paths to Wellbeing set out to bring the joy of walking to communities that historically have had the least access and the most barriers to the great outdoors. It's a fantastic example of how the Ramblers opens the way for everyone to enjoy the pleasures of walking in nature.

By providing tools, training and support, the project has helped local people devise new walking routes, improve existing ones and – importantly – maintain and sustain them for the future.

The project was created to look at new ways to improve paths and access, as we estimate around 50% of paths in Wales are inaccessible. The project's delivery officers worked with 18 communities, including 12 of the most deprived in Wales.

In each location, project staff supported by the wider Ramblers Cymru team worked with local people to shape plans and make them a reality. Along the way, they worked with all 22 Welsh local authorities and numerous partners, including Wildlife Trusts Wales, Coed Cadw (the Woodland Trust in Wales), the Welsh Refugee Council, and Diverse Cymru, plus local landowners and businesses.

Paths to Wellbeing brought together volunteers of all ages and backgrounds, from schoolchildren and Brownies to disability groups and retirement communities. An independent evaluation found that volunteering with the project helped make people happier, more relaxed, and more physically active.

The project's funding may have ended, but several local authorities have been so impressed by the results that they plan to continue its work, consolidating their collaboration with Ramblers Cymru, providing funding and support to keep communities walking.