



Opening the Way

The Ramblers' Strategic Ambition
2024 and beyond



From our Chair and Chief Executive

We are delighted to share the Ramblers' ambitions for the future, where everyone has the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of walking in nature.

Rebecca Dawson

Chair of Trustees
2021 to 2024

Lucy Robinson

Chair of Trustees
2024 onwards

Ross Maloney

Chief Executive

As we launch Opening the Way: The Ramblers' Strategic Ambition 2024 and beyond, the nation is facing a range of social and economic challenges that are impacting our health and wellbeing. With pressure continuing to build on the NHS and other public services, fault lines in our society are being accentuated and some people are becoming even more marginalised.

This plan recognises the important role walking can play in improving this picture for all.

We know walking in nature enriches our lives and can have a transformative effect on health and wellbeing. In England alone, our research has shown that use of the path network adds more than 3,000 healthy years of life to the population. But currently, not everyone is able to enjoy these benefits. Many communities – often those who would benefit most from better access to the outdoors – are missing out.

It's become clear that significant inequities exist when it comes to the opportunity to get outside in nature, and this is a pressing concern for the outdoors sector. As we look forward, we can see the clear role the Ramblers has to play in helping to address these inequities.

This strategy sets out our ambition to address the imbalance by prioritising the needs of communities who have the least access and face the most barriers to walking in nature.

At our core is the drive to improve provision and quality of access, paths and rights of way, and the information that helps people find their way. This is a critical foundation of our work, and we'll continue to make sure people have access to green space and good quality walking routes both close to home and further afield.

We also want to improve people's confidence and knowledge to walk outdoors, so they're not held back from making the most of everything walking in nature can offer. The lack of confidence and knowledge might be a less visible barrier, but it's just as real and just as important to overcome.

In England alone, our research has shown that use of the path network adds more than 3,000 healthy years of life to the population.

To grow support and achieve our ambitions of reaching more people, we'll also work hard to raise awareness of the Ramblers' unique public benefit as a charity.

Our recognition of the challenges posed by the climate emergency, and the collective need to act to protect the natural environment, will be a key element to all our work. As a charity committed to helping everyone enjoy walking in nature, all our ambitions will be underpinned by the role the Ramblers needs to play in protecting the natural environment in the course of our work.

Opening the Way: The Ramblers' Strategic Ambition 2024 and beyond has been developed over a period of nearly two years. Over that time, we have conducted extensive research with a wide range of people. We would like to thank everyone who has been involved – every individual, partner, supporter, member and volunteer who has taken the time to share their thoughts and ideas. With your support, we have a clear route mapped out for the future, which will enrich the lives of communities across Britain.

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

Strong foundations, bold ambitions

Since 1935, the Ramblers has been doing everything it can to make sure everyone, everywhere can enjoy walking in nature. Our history and heritage give us the perfect springboard to realise the bold ambitions set out in the strategy.

Throughout our almost 90-year history, we have fought to make sure everyone can enjoy the joys of walking in nature.

We've helped open up vast swathes of countryside that were previously out of bounds and made sure laws were amended and introduced to keep it that way. We fought to establish National Parks and National Trails. And we successfully campaigned for everyone to enjoy Britain's coastline.

Today, we continue the fight to protect and improve access across England, Scotland and Wales. We work to save lost rights of way and maintain and improve paths so they can be enjoyed by all. We lead more than 50,000 walks every year, from short strolls to scrambles in the hills.

With the introduction of our new strategy, we'll build on this experience, and expand activities that specifically focus on reaching communities who have the least access and face the most barriers to the outdoors. Our past, present and future is rooted in local communities, so we are ideally placed to listen, learn and work alongside them to introduce programmes and activities that address their specific needs.

We look forward to building on the success of programmes that have a big impact in local communities such as those we deliver in partnership with others. In particular, Ramblers Wellbeing Walks, our short walks that help people take the first step to a healthier happier lifestyle, and the Out There Award, which gives young adults, aged 18–26 the opportunity to kickstart their journey into the outdoors, while giving them the opportunity to meet other young walkers and learn skills.

The support, knowledge and experience of the Ramblers' supporters, members and volunteers has been vital throughout our history and will be fundamental to achieving our ambitions as we look forward to the future.



Our new strategy

The Ramblers exists to help everyone, everywhere enjoy walking. We know how much it contributes to improvements in individual and community wellbeing, so our new strategy sets out to tackle the barriers that prevent more people enjoying those benefits.

Alongside our supporters, members and volunteers, we will continue our work to protect access, improve paths and lead walks. And we will prioritise the needs of communities who have the least access and face the most barriers to the outdoors. We will especially focus on working with the most deprived communities in England, Scotland and Wales.



Foundations

Our strategy is built on our foundations for impact, which are:

Vision

A future where anyone can enjoy walking outdoors.

Purpose

Campaigning for access to the outdoors and creating walking opportunities for all.

Impact

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

Outcomes

Over the coming years, we'll strive to achieve the following outcomes and impact measures:



Outcome one

Improved provision, quality and information on access, paths and rights of way.

- 2,000 more miles of paths opened or improved.
- 75% of people who walk with us agree that the Ramblers has increased their access and connection to nature and green spaces.



Outcome two

Improved confidence and knowledge to walk outdoors.

- 5 million people accessed our advice, information and training.
- 90% of people report increased confidence to walk outdoors in nature.
- 50,000 more walk leaders.



Outcome three

Improved participation of communities that have the least access and most barriers to the outdoors.

- 1,000 more programmes engaging priority communities.
- 10,000 more volunteers from priority communities.



Outcome four

Improved support for the Ramblers' charitable cause.

- 500,000 members, volunteers, supporters, donors or benefactors.
- 65% of people who are aware of the Ramblers agree that it's a charity that meets a relevant need.

Enablers

Our use of resources and our activities will be guided by:

Sustainable income and investment

Targeted advocacy, policy and public affairs

Streamlined partnerships, programmes and networks

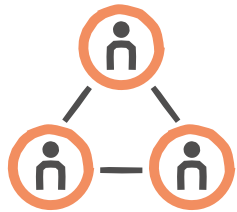
Data, insight and digital innovation

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

Fit for purpose governance and operating models

Our values

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



Inclusive

We make everyone feel welcome and part of the Ramblers' community.

We make sure we all feel respected, accepted, and know our contributions make a difference in achieving our mission.



Inspiring

We strive to inspire people through the way we act and the things we say.

We channel our passions and ambition, so others are motivated to help us achieve our mission.



Empowering

We empower and encourage each other to make a positive contribution to our teams and the Ramblers.

We do all we can to make sure everyone has the ability and confidence to take action.



Responsible

We take responsibility for ourselves and those around us seriously, by always acting in a safe and positive way.

We care about the environment and make sure we do what we say we will do.



Outcome one

Improved provision, quality and information on access, paths and rights of way.

We'll remove barriers to the outdoors by improving the quality and provision of access, paths and rights of way to enable more people to enjoy walking in nature. We will do this through both our programmes on the ground and our campaigning work.

In addition, we'll place a growing emphasis on 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 to improve local paths. Integral to this approach is a commitment to working with partners and communities to understand and mitigate the environmental impacts of our work.



Our successes to date



Discovering hidden paths in Stoke-on-Trent

Across England and Wales, there are miles of historic rights of way not currently recorded on maps and at risk of being lost. Since 2015, Ramblers' volunteers in Stoke-on-Trent have been working with the local council to uncover the hidden public rights of way across their city.

This work is part of the thousands of hours a year that our volunteers put into protecting paths – from researching and reclaiming lost historical paths to scrutinising potential changes to the network and replacing stiles with gates to make them more accessible. As a result of the work in Stoke-on-Trent, a total of 104-miles of previously unrecorded public rights of way were added to the definitive map, increasing the city's recorded network by an amazing 350%.

Creating green walking routes in Glasgow

In the south-side of Glasgow, Gary Linstead realised the city was not making the most of its green spaces and set out to make sure they were connected to give residents and visitors the opportunity to walk safely between them.

Gary and other volunteers started small, improving individual paths before they secured a grant that allowed them to properly waymark and connect them up. The completed route is an 11-mile circular walk, which links seven wonderful greenspace habitats,

including Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

“It's difficult to make walking part of everyday life unless there are opportunities to get out in nature close to home”, says Gary, “so, I set out to walk that route and try to connect them. That was the birth of the Magnificent 11.”





Outcome two

Improved confidence and knowledge to walk outdoors.

We'll explore new ways to support priority communities, through engagement and collaboration. We'll extend impactful programmes like Ramblers Wellbeing Walks, which supports people with health conditions, and the Out There Award, which helps young adults in urban areas.

We'll also make our walk leader advice and training more relevant and easily accessible to communities across England, Scotland and Wales, giving more people the skills and confidence to go walking.

Our successes to date



Building skills and confidence with the Out There Award

We'll build on the success of projects like the Out There Award, which is helping 18-26-year-olds in Scotland build the skills and confidence needed to fully enjoy the outdoors. Accessibility and inclusivity are at the heart of the award – from making sure the location is easy to get to and the right equipment is provided, to using diverse methods to build skills and knowledge.

“For me, the Out There Award was an amazing step towards learning how to tackle my key anxieties for hiking,” says Iqra, an Out There Award participant. “Those anxieties were tackled by learning which equipment to use, becoming part of the young walking group after the award, and learning how to keep myself safe and on track. Altogether, I feel less scared and I’m now excited to be part of a walking group and to pick up a new, fun hobby.”

How leading walks helped Dee rebuild her confidence

Before she started walking, Dee was 17 stone and housebound. 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 a Ramblers Wellbeing Walk in Wisbech, run in partnership with Active Fenland.

“Walking will always hold a special place in my heart,” says Dee. “It’s very underestimated but when I look at my journey, if I didn’t walk, I wouldn’t have been able to run. Leading walks has given me the confidence that I had before I gained so much weight – for me, my passion is to get people active.”





Outcome three

Improved participation of communities that have the least access and most barriers to the outdoors.

We'll prioritise improving the participation of communities facing the greatest barriers to walking in nature when developing campaigns and programmes. We will actively engage, listen, and learn from priority communities, and work with them to develop new approaches to supporting people walking outdoors.

We'll also double down on our efforts to become a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive charity.



Our successes to date



Transforming lives and landscapes with Paths to Wellbeing

In 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. 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's delivery officers worked alongside local people in 18 communities to shape plans and make them a reality. In the Rhondda Valley, Lee Williams from Welcome to the Woods, one of the project partners, told us, "Paths to Wellbeing is going to make the area so much more accessible for people who haven't really been out to walk in the area before. They might have lived locally all their lives, and not realised what they've got on their doorstep."

Leading walks for people seeking asylum

Mole Valley Ramblers were approached by the local police about organising walks for people waiting for their asylum claims to be processed. 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.

Mole Valley Ramblers plotted routes, and soon, they held their first walk. The benefit was immediate. The men started chatting amongst themselves, with many wanting to practise their English.

As the walks continued, the connections between the walkers grew stronger. Despite not sharing a language and coming from different cultures and countries, 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 and explore the beautiful countryside and its nature" says Jai, one of the walkers who took part.





Outcome four

Improved support for the Ramblers' charitable cause.

We'll sharpen our focus on our unique public benefit as a charity. We will demonstrate the impact of our work through the strength of our actions, while changing and revitalising perceptions of the Ramblers through our communications. This will help us inspire new partners, communities, and generations of walkers to support us in our ambition to create a future where anyone can enjoy walking 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.

Our successes to date



How volunteering is helping to build Conor's CV

Conor, 21, became interested in volunteering for the Ramblers when he heard about the research a friend was doing for Don't Lose Your Way, our campaign to save lost paths. He decided to become a path protection volunteer. I thought the role would help protect the path network. I monitor up to 40 planning submissions across West Sussex ... keeping an eye on a priority list where I think building and development could possibly compromise access and rights of way."

As a second-year law student, Conor knows the experience will be a great addition to his CV once he's graduated from university and is looking for a job. "It feels great to be part of a community of volunteers who are all working towards making sure paths remain accessible for all."

Discovering the joy of walking with the Ramblers

Dawn joined the Ramblers after a friend gave her Ramblers gift membership as a present. She has always loved walking but initially, she had some preconceptions about the Ramblers and wasn't sure if it was her. This changed as soon as she began going along to some group walks. "I've always felt really welcome ... and my social world has grown in my time of being a member of the Ramblers", she says.

Dawn is happy to go along to any walk – she doesn't just limit herself to the ones organised by her group or to particular distances.

It doesn't matter how long or short the walk is, she likes to try out different walks and meet lots of different people. "I've walked with other local groups and even further afield in Wales. When you join any Ramblers group, you'll always have something to talk about."

Dawn has also volunteered for Ramblers Wellbeing Walks. As a carer, she's particularly passionate about these walks. "These walks are so important because you get outside in the sunshine; it's about walking and talking to people and being mindful."



Enablers

We have six enablers that will help us realise our strategy:

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 by demonstrating our charitable impact and public benefit to ensure financial sustainability.

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.

Streamlined partnerships, programmes and networks

We will:

- Enable and support a thriving network of local groups and areas.
- Act as a convener 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.
- Collaborate with organisations that work towards protecting and enhancing the natural environment in response to the climate emergency.

Targeted advocacy, policy and public affairs

We will:

- Review our advocacy priorities to make sure we're focused on breaking down the barriers to walking outdoors in nature.
- Optimise our public affairs activity to grow our influence with government and other key stakeholders.

Data, insight and digital innovation

We will:

- Provide digital tools that make it easier for 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.

Fit for purpose governance and operating models

We will:

- Review and optimise our governance and operating models, ensuring we're making the most of our people and financial resources.

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