



A Review of the Wales Coast Path on its 10th Anniversary

Recommendations for Future
Development

The Wales Coast Path Review Group

Foreword

Our Wales Coast Path Review Group was set up at the request of the Deputy Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters MS, who asked the Group to reflect on the key achievements over the last decade and identify how to maximise opportunities for the future.

In 2012, Wales became the first nation in the world to create a dedicated path around an entire coastline. The Wales Coast Path established Wales as a pioneer in opening up access to the natural environment, and in providing an iconic tourist destination with an international reputation.

Our review was shaped around four key themes:

- **a focus on local communities** – putting people and places at the heart of the Wales Coast Path.
- **a focus on Wales itself** – identifying the power of the Wales Coast Path to help change Wales for the better.
- **a focus beyond Wales** – harnessing the power of the Wales Coastal Path internationally.
- **a focus on future generations** - enabling a sustainable and vibrant future for the Wales Coast Path.

Our report sets out the Group's recommendations to Welsh Government and to the organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group (NRW and the Local and National Park Authorities along the route). These recommendations should be seen as a starting point for Ministers to co-produce an exciting and refreshed vision and strategic direction for the Path and to work with renewed vigour with stakeholders and communities across Wales. We want Welsh Government to use the Wales Coast Path, together with our wider trails network, as a catalyst for the development of a national culture of being outdoors every day, for longer and with higher levels of activity, for the good of the people of Wales.

We thank the many people and organisations who contributed ideas and brought challenge to the Review Group.

As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Wales Coast Path, our advice for anyone reading this report, is this: go out and enjoy the Wales Coast Path – and our incredible wealth of long-distance trails and paths in Wales. Take this report with you to read as you go!

Huw Irranca-Davies MS
Chair, Wales Coast Path Review Group

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Welsh Government should set out a clear and compelling vision for the future of the Wales Coast Path. The Review Group believes this should reflect the full potential of the Path to contribute to health and well-being; to respond to the nature and climate emergencies; which inspires people to connect with nature and enjoy outdoor activity; and which strengthens the international leadership of Wales in these matters.

The Wales Coast Path will be internationally recognised and accessible to all in inspiring and enabling a connection to nature that supports the health and well-being of the people of Wales and the natural world.

Recommendation 2: Welsh Government should use the 10th anniversary to begin a national conversation to guide the development of the Wales Coast Path for the next decade and beyond. Building on the vision, this should result in the development of a strategy including specific actions and timescales.

Recommendation 3: Welsh Government should use the power of the Wales Coast Path as a catalyst for connecting people to nature more often and for longer, to help realise the wider benefits to health and wellbeing, and to promote a cultural change towards a deeper appreciation and enjoyment of nature and the outdoors.

Recommendation 4: An inaugural “Walk the Path” event should be held for key stakeholders in health and well-being to promote better understanding of the well-being potential of the outdoors. This should be seen as the start of a national “call-to-action” to develop new thinking and new partnerships in promoting the wider benefits of outdoor activity.

Recommendation 5: The organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group should identify and build on the learning and good practice that already exists to deepen relationships with diverse user groups across the length of the Path, with a view to managing potential conflicts and promoting sustainable and responsible access

Recommendation 6: The organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group should seek to expand upon their work with local access forums to identify, map and promote routes suitable for different users. This may include short new routes or sections which deviate from and re-join the primary walking route, circular routes linked to the Wales Coast Path, or new routes.

Recommendation 7: Welsh Government should work with the organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group to bring forward options which may include legislative and non-legislative mechanisms (including roll-back provisions) to improve the way in which the Wales Coast Path can respond rapidly to erosion and reinstatement of the Path.

Recommendation 8: Natural Resources Wales should amend the quality standards for the Wales Coast Path and the other National Trails in Wales to include “inspiring nature recovery”, and seek to roll-out best practice on biodiversity enhancements and nature recovery with a view to this becoming normal practice

Recommendation 9: Welsh Government should include the development and maintenance of the Wales Coast Path and access to it in the development of the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

Recommendation 10: Welsh Government should bring forward specific proposals on the contribution of the Wales Coast Path to modal shift towards sustainable travel and active travel for visitors and residents, which should include viable long-term funding.

Recommendation 11: We would encourage the organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group to work with Google to expand filming of the Path for Google Street view.

Recommendation 12: Consideration should be given to developing a dedicated Wales Coast Path business portal, bringing together businesses along both the whole and sections of the Coast Path to improve collaboration, provide advice and support, and identify further opportunities for business development and the creation of employment.

Recommendation 13: To mark the 10th Anniversary of the Wales Coast Path, the organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group should commit to work actively with schools and with public, private and voluntary organisations to develop physical and nature literacy to give the opportunity to every child in Wales of a minimum of a day's walk on the Wales Coast Path - or a long-distance trail - by the time they leave primary school.

Recommendation 14: Welsh Government should develop an updated and renewed oversight structure for managing the Wales Coast Path, reflecting the new strategic approach and ambitions for the Path.

Recommendation 15: Welsh Government should explore models to encourage greater co-operation and collaboration – especially on a local and community basis - to deepen community engagement and to support the new strategic approach for the Wales Coast Path,

Recommendation 16: The organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group should – with the support of Welsh Government - develop an evidenced based long-term plan for securing maintenance and new funding, taking into account the agreed benefits the Path can bring to diverse funders in line with the new vision for the Wales Coast Path (including health and well-being, and nature recovery etc).

Recommendation 17: Natural Resources Wales should develop a refreshed approach to data capture and analysis relating to the uses and impacts of the Wales Coast Path, monitoring and reporting to allow for sound financial planning and realisation of benefits.

Recommendation 18: Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales should consolidate resources and responsibilities for national level marketing of the Wales Coast Path with Visit Wales

Recommendation 19: Marketing for the Wales Coast Path should be linked to the whole long-distance trails network, promoting a package of sustainable tourism opportunities in Wales.

1. Creating a Bold Vision to Realise the Full Potential of the Wales Coast Path

Since the landmark establishment of the Wales Coast Path in 2012, the Welsh Government has subsequently passed ground-breaking legislation in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Welsh Government has also recognised the scale of the threat to our environment by declaring climate and nature emergencies and has highlighted the public health challenges caused by sedentary lifestyles, poor mental health and more recently by Covid 19. Within this changed context, the Wales Coast Path Review Group has focussed on new ways in which the full potential of the Wales Coast Path can be realised, bringing the widest possible range of sustainable and inclusive benefits for the people of and visitors to Wales.

We asked stakeholders to tell us what a vision for the Wales Coast Path's future should look like. Their responses reflected their huge optimism for the future of the Path; respondents saw the Path as visionary, symbolic, inspiring, while also identifying the many challenges to securing a viable and exciting future for the Path.



In looking to the future, we believe Welsh Government should help set a new and ambitious vision for the Wales Coast Path, steered by the work of this Review

Group. This vision, while recognising and promoting the economic impact of the Path and its international reach as a visitor attraction, should now reflect the context of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, and new priorities and challenges. This revitalised focus on maximising the contribution of the Path to the Well-being Goals, the wider public health of the people of Wales and the natural environment is crucial to achieving the economic and international impacts in a truly sustainable way.

The Review Group identified some key principles that should form part of future strategic planning:

- Sustainability must be at the core of all that the Wales Coast Path aspires to do.
- The Wales Coast Path is iconic; it should be seen as the jewel of a vibrant network of long-distance trails in Wales.
- The Path must be viewed as part of a wider coastal corridor or zone to achieve maximum access and engagement and wider economic benefits.
- The Path should inspire and provide opportunity for behaviour change in relation to both public health and the environment.

Recommendation 1: The Welsh Government should set out a clear and compelling vision for the future of the Wales Coast Path. The Review Group believes this should reflect the full potential of the Path to contribute to health and well-being; to respond to the nature and climate emergencies; which inspires people to connect with nature and enjoy outdoor activity; and which strengthens the international leadership of Wales in these matters.

The Wales Coast Path will be internationally recognised and accessible to all in inspiring and enabling a connection to nature that supports the health and well-being of the people of Wales and the natural world.

2. Making Connections – Nationally and Internationally

The Wales Coast Path is an iconic and emblematic route, which speaks of Wales as a nation, our values, and how we want others to see and engage with us.

The Review Group believe Welsh Government should use the symbolic power of the Path to send a message to the whole of Wales and to the rest of the world about what is important to our nation, including:

- The health and wellbeing of the people of Wales and visitors to Wales.
- Sustainable tourism that benefits our communities economically, socially and culturally.
- Sustainable and active travel to and from Wales and around the Path's communities.
- Sustainable land management.
- Our commitment to tackling the climate and nature emergencies.
- The role of education in promoting the Path's contribution to sustainability and wellbeing in Wales and the wider world.
- International Strategy for Wales.
- Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary.

The first decade of the Wales Coast Path has been a success in many ways, but moreover it has provided a strong foundation to do more, with even greater potential in the years ahead as a source of physical activity and leisure; an aid to improved mental health and wellbeing; a corridor for biodiversity; a builder of strong local communities; an economic generator and a beacon of our national values.

Recommendation 2: Welsh Government should use the 10th anniversary to begin a national conversation to guide the development of the Path for the next decade and beyond. Building on the vision, this should result in the development of a strategy including specific actions and timescales.

3. Health and Well-being

Many of us have rekindled our relationship with the natural world and with outdoor activity during the Covid 19 pandemic, rediscovering an appreciation for the benefits that being active outside can bring for our physical and mental health and wellbeing and for building and sustaining connections within and between our local communities.

The 10th anniversary of the Wales Coast Path should be seized as a catalyst to develop a bold and imaginative programme linking residents and visitors with the diverse benefits of active recreation outdoors, as part of a sustained mission to significantly increase regular activity and enjoyment of the outdoors.

Crucially, the focus should be on putting in place proven approaches, along with sustained funding and training for practitioners, for a minimum of 10 years if we are to realise population level health outcomes.

The Review Group believes that the Wales Coast Path can play a central role in encouraging more people to get outside and enjoy the natural environment more often and for longer. The wider objective could be a cultural change to become a more outdoor-focussed nation. Lessons should be drawn from international research and evaluation studies. Links should also be made to initiatives like the Valleys Regional Park, working consistently to seize opportunities to promote outdoor access and participation across Wales. Ramblers Cymru's 'Paths to Wellbeing' scheme, funded by the Welsh Government, is another good example of how communities can support each other to reap the benefits of being outdoors for their own health and the good of the environment.

Recommendation 3: Welsh Government should use the power of the Wales Coast Path as a catalyst for connecting people to nature more often and for longer, to help realise the wider benefits to health and wellbeing, and to promote a cultural change towards a deeper appreciation and enjoyment of nature and the outdoors.

Recommendation 4: An inaugural "Walk the Path" event should be held for key stakeholders in health and well-being to promote better understanding of the well-being potential of the outdoors. This should be seen as the start of a national "call-to-action" to develop new thinking and new partnerships in promoting the wider benefits of outdoor activity.

4. Access and Participation

Research shows that there are still too many people in Wales who do not use or infrequently use the Wales Coast Path or other green spaces in Wales. The physical, economic, social, cultural reasons for this are complex – as are the solutions. Working with low-participation groups and individuals to understand the obstacles is crucial.

Initially, the Path was conceived primarily as a walking route but has developed over time to offer a wider experience for different users. For example, the increasing popularity of off-road cycling (and more recently e-bikes) has led to these new users accessing parts of the Path. However, if not well managed this has the potential for user-conflict, as well as causing other problems such as increased erosion at sensitive sites.

Some stakeholders want to see enhanced but managed access for cyclists and horse riders at appropriate sections. Others were concerned that sections of the Path were unsuitable for users other than walkers, or that alternative coast routes should be devised for non-walkers. From land-managers and access forum partners there is clear recognition of these issues and the balance which needs to be struck between the varied needs of all potential users, whilst preserving the natural features of the Path and respecting the rights of landowners.

There is a desire to more effectively manage the growing use of the Path, the potential conflicts between users, and the environmental impacts. There is also recognition that better management, improved mapping, and the potential for new and alternative routes for some users away from sensitive sites and “honeypots” would be welcome. Where new and wider access is developed - including to the sea - appropriate infrastructure development and related funding will be required.

Recommendation 5: The organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group should identify and build on the learning and good practice that already exists to deepen relationships with diverse user groups across the length of the Path, with a view to managing potential conflicts and promoting sustainable and responsible access.

Recommendation 6: The organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group should seek to expand upon their work with local access forums to identify, map and promote routes suitable for different users. This may include short new routes or sections which deviate from and re-join the primary walking route, circular routes linked to the Wales Coast Path, or new routes.

5. Sustainable Land Management

Promoting and expanding responsible access to the Wales Coast Path and to circular and linked routes must be considered as part of the wider conversation about sustainable land use, and responsible access to the coast and countryside. Likewise, the potential of the Path in the promotion of nature and biodiversity

recovery and in our response to climate change is bound up in these wider policy reforms.

Addressing the effects of coastal erosion and climate change and maintaining and managing access are, and will continue to be, an ongoing challenge for the organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group and landowners. Stakeholders told us about the impacts of coastal erosion, of high-volume visitor numbers on the most popular sections, of unsatisfactory sections with “gaps” in the Path and where the Path is on roads or could otherwise be considered unfinished. Restatement and realignment of the Path where erosion has removed sections often takes too long or leads to large diversions inland and away from the “best possible route”.

Recommendation 7: Welsh Government should work with the organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group to bring forward options which may include legislative and non-legislative mechanisms (including roll-back provisions) to improve the way in which the Wales Coast Path can respond rapidly to erosion and reinstatement of the Path.

There are already some good examples of projects to enhance biodiversity on the Path, such as the Living Trails Project pilot on the Llyn Peninsular and the Pollinator Wardens in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. The Review Group felt, subject to evaluation, that these projects had the potential to be scaled up and replicated across the length of the Path.

Recommendation 8: Natural Resources Wales should amend the quality standards for the Wales Coast Path and the other Welsh National Trails to include “inspiring nature recovery” and seek to roll-out best practise on biodiversity enhancements and nature recovery with a view to this becoming normal practice.

Sustainable land management and future reform of farm support also offer opportunities to be realised from wider access and in linking the Path to local communities, deepening also the economic, social and cultural opportunities for businesses and communities along the coastal corridor. These should include working with local landowners and organisations and access forums to actively develop and promote new and existing circular routes.

Recommendation 9: Welsh Government should include the development and maintenance of the Wales Coast Path and access to it in the development of the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

6. Sustainable Travel

The vision for the future of the Wales Coast Path must have strong sustainability at its heart. So, how we all – visitors and local residents - travel to and around the Coast Path and coastal corridor is important. Over the last decade there have been some excellent examples of how to increase the use of public and on-demand transport in and around the coastal corridor, including Fflecsi-bus and Bwcabus,

seasonal public transport schemes aimed at visitors and tourists, and efforts to promote active travel.

But these initiatives have too often be characterised by short-term funding and financial instability. There is real potential for the Wales Coast Path to play its part by exemplifying the best of what we can do in modal shift, in the way we get to the coast, and the way we travel around it. The benefits of providing investment in sustainable transportation should be to visitors and local residents.

Recommendation 10: Welsh Government should bring forward specific proposals on the contribution of the Wales Coast Path to modal shift towards sustainable travel and active travel for visitors and residents, which should include viable long-term funding.

7. Enhancing the Digital Experience

Gwynedd and Anglesey County Councils and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority have been forerunners of filming of the Wales Coast Path, working with Google Street view to ensure a mass audience for the results. The Review Group see huge potential in expanding this progressively further along the Path, enabling visitors to plan their route experiencing virtually the challenges, character and accessibility of the section they wished to access. Filming for Google Street view also acts as a promotional tool which allows potential visitors to experience the Path remotely and plan their visit better. Finally, for some who may never be able to physically visit all or parts of the Path, it allows a remarkable virtual experience of the Wales Coast Path.

There was real potential for local businesses to be able to use filming for Google Street view to advertise to a wide audience and for landowners to be able to explore options for land use diversification.

Recommendation 11: We would encourage the organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group to work with Google to expand filming of the Path for Google Street view.

We heard that the draw of the Wales Coast Path has been of real benefit to many coastal businesses through increased tourism and visitor spend. Yet there is further potential through sharing best practice and information. There were pockets of good practice but no mechanism to share that learning and experience across the length of the Path. This would be particularly important for sharing lessons about income diversification and generation.

Recommendation 12: Consideration should be given to developing a dedicated Wales Coast Path business portal, bringing together businesses along both the whole and sections of the Coast Path to improve collaboration, provide advice and support, and identify further opportunities for business development and the creation of employment.

8. Education

The Review Group recognised the potential use of the Wales Coast Path to develop awareness and education in sustainability and health and wellbeing and, more specifically, in relation to nature, marine life, biodiversity, history, archaeology, myths and legends, and the Welsh language and culture.

The Group welcomed the role that Natural Resources Wales, Visit Wales and voluntary bodies play in supporting Wales's national mission in education and stressed the importance of education at all levels to ensure the maximum positive impact of the Wales Coast Path: primary schools have a key role to play in introducing children to outdoor physical activity, nature and key concepts in sustainability, health and wellbeing; secondary schools need to sustain these general interests in young people and develop more specialist knowledge through subjects such as history and geography and any new qualifications designed to meet the needs of learners and align to the Curriculum for Wales; universities have a role to play in developing research and evaluation and in developing the education, skills and training for the future professionals who will sustain the Path and its surrounding economies and communities.

Recommendation 13: To mark the 10th Anniversary of the Wales Coast Path, the organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group should commit to work actively with schools and with public, private and voluntary organisations to develop physical and nature literacy to give the opportunity to every child in Wales of a minimum of a day's walk on the Wales Coast Path - or a long-distance trail - by the time they leave primary school.

9. Management

The Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group includes the Local and National Park Authorities along the route, is overseen by Natural Resources Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government. It draws together those responsible for the day-to-day management of the Wales Coast Path.

However, if Welsh Government is to take forward a more integral role for the Path in major cross cutting policies, then updated and renewed structures will be needed to oversee this work and drive the proposed new strategic direction for the Wales Coast Path.

Those structures will also need to draw in new partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors, and consider how to engage with local communities, business, tourism associations, charities and 'Friends of...' groups. There will also need to be engagement with public sector organisations such as Corporate Joint Committees, Public Service Boards and Health Boards.

Recommendation 14: Welsh Government should develop an updated and renewed oversight structure for managing the Wales Coast Path, reflecting the new strategic approach and ambitions for the Path

In addition, within the parameters of the Review, the Wales Co-operative Centre has undertaken some initial scoping work on possible co-operative and collaborative

models to strengthen and deepen engagement with the Wales Coast Path which could include local and community-led approaches, drawing on established social enterprises and local groups.

Recommendation 15: Welsh Government should explore models to encourage greater co-operation and collaboration – especially on a local and community basis - to deepen community engagement and to support the new strategic approach for the Wales Coast Path.

10. Resources

The recent upturn in visitors during and following the Covid 19 pandemic has been welcomed but has also placed a strain on the infrastructure of the Wales Coast Path. Most of the current resource and funding for the Path is directed into maintenance and is predominately sourced through single year funding, via a grant distributed by NRW to the partner authorities. Some additional funding is also provided by the authorities themselves and via specific projects. Maintenance costs will rise as visitor numbers rise, as the impacts of coastal and other erosion are felt, and as the original decade-old investment in infrastructure tires.

Recommendation 16: The organisations that make up the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group should – with the support of Welsh Government - develop an evidenced based long-term plan for securing maintenance and new funding, taking into account the agreed benefits the Wales Coast Path can bring to diverse funders in line with the new vision for Path (including health and well-being, and nature recovery etc).

Bringing new partners on board brings new funding opportunities into play, particularly if there is good data to evidence the benefits of the Path. There is investment potential in the goodwill the Path generates, and this could also provide a possible funding option.

Recommendation 17: Natural Resources Wales should develop a refreshed approach to data capture and analysis relating to the uses and impacts of the Wales Coast Path, monitoring and reporting to allow for sound financial planning and realisation of benefits.

The Review Group saw value in drawing in volunteers from local communities to promote community involvement and assist with caring for the Path. The National Trust's COASTodian initiative is an example of how residents can help to look after their favourite spots. Opportunities to offer apprenticeships for local people which include work associated with the Path was another great suggestion.

11. Marketing

The Review Group was told the sustainability of the marketing for the Wales Coast Path has been a long-standing concern. Over the past decade both the

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and NRW have been undertaking work to market and promote the Path, however, funding and planning has been on an annual basis and there is a need to agree a longer-term approach. There was widespread praise for the approach led by Visit Wales, including the above partners, has taken to marketing the 10th Anniversary and a view that this could be a model for the future.

Recommendation 18: Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales should consolidate resources and responsibilities for national level marketing of the Wales Coast Path with Visit Wales

Recommendation 19: Marketing for the Wales Coast Path should be linked to the whole long-distance trails network, promoting a package of sustainable tourism opportunities in Wales.

Appendix

Who were the Review Group?

Chair, Huw Irranca-Davies MS

Professor Cara Aitchison, Vice Chancellor, Cardiff Metropolitan University

Tegryn Jones, Chief Executive, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

Rob Owen, Chair Ramblers Cymru

Ceri Witchard, Deputy Director Landscapes, Nature and Forestry

Simon Pickering, Head of Landscape and Outdoor Recreation

Steffan Roberts, Deputy Director, Tourism Development and Sport

Andrew Forfar Wallace, Regional Engagement Manager for Visit Wales

Ruth Jenkins, Head of Natural Resource Management Policy, NRW

Cllr Huw Thomas, Spokesperson Culture, Sport and Tourism, WLGA

Kaarina Ruta, Transport Assistant, WLGA

Dr Andy Williams, Research Manager Wales Institute for Health & Physical Literacy,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

Andy Middleton, Chief Exploration Officer, Tyf