

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE: 'A NATIONAL PLAN FOR SPORT, HEALTH AND WELLBEING'

Grand Committee, House of Lords

Thursday 09 February 2023

- **The Countryside Alliance welcomed the formation of the National Plan for Sport and Recreation Committee to devise a cross-party national plan for sport, health and wellbeing.**
- **The Alliance welcomes the Committee's final Report and believes the Government should take forward its key recommendations.**
- **Given the broad interpretation of the terms 'recreation' and 'physical activity' as used in the report that includes "any activity that involves physical movement", we believe it is regrettable that there is only a brief reference to angling and no reference to shooting or equestrian activities.**
- **We submitted [written evidence](#) to the inquiry in conjunction with the British Horse Society, the Pony Club and the Angling Trust, which in this briefing we wish to highlight in order to address what we believe to be a shortcoming in the Report, that must not be repeated in any Government action to improve levels of physical activity and sport in its broadest sense.**
- **Shooting is vital to the rural economy. For many isolated and rural areas, shooting can be the lynchpin that ensures the community economically survives for 12 months of the year. It also involves thousands of people in outdoor activity not only on shooting days but throughout the year, especially in the extensive conservation work undertaken by shoots both by professionals and volunteers.**
- **Angling makes a significant contribution to national strategic objectives in sport, the environment and the economy. It engages huge numbers of people – estimated to involve around 900,000 fishing in freshwater in England and Wales and around 750,000 people who fish in the sea every year in the UK.**
- **The economic value of the equestrian sector stands at £4.7 billion of consumer spending across a wide range of goods and services each year. This has increased from £4.3 billion in 2015. There are 27 million people in Britain with an interest in the equestrian industry.**

Background

- The Countryside Alliance welcomed the formation of the House of Lords National Plan for Sport and Recreation Committee to devise a cross-party national plan for sport, health and wellbeing. We regret, however, that the Report makes only a brief reference to angling and no reference to shooting or equestrian activities.
- Given the broad interpretation of the terms ‘recreation’ and ‘physical activity’ as used in the report, we believe that these omissions are significant and a missed opportunity and are keen that in any future Government action that these activities are properly recognised.
- Having indicated that the report is primarily concerned with rates of physical inactivity and the resulting impact on public health, it goes on to state:

“For the purposes of this report, we use the terms recreation and physical activity interchangeably to refer to activities that keep people active but which are outside of organised competitive sports. We also take a broad view as to what constitutes ‘recreation’ and would consider any activity that involves physical movement to fall within our definition.”

- We submitted [written evidence](#) to the Committee in conjunction with the British Horse Society, the Pony Club and the Angling Trust, which we wish to highlight in order to address what we believe to be a shortcoming in the Report, that must not be repeated in any Government action to improve levels of physical activity and sport in its broadest sense.
- Any national plan should recognise the opportunities for outdoor recreation and ‘getting active’ associated with traditional pursuits in the countryside, such as riding, fishing/angling and shooting. Whether going for a ride, following a trail hunt, shooting, or sitting by a stream or canal these all make a massive contribution to recreation in the UK and to the physical and mental health of many thousands of people.
- Moreover, riding and shooting sports offer some unique opportunities for those with disabilities, while fishing has been shown to assist with children who find traditional learning in the classroom challenging, and fly fishing has been shown to be good therapy for women recovering from breast cancer.

Shooting

- Shooting is vital to the rural economy. For many isolated and rural areas, shooting can be the lynchpin that ensures the community economically survives for 12 months of the year.
- Shooting is worth £2 billion to the UK economy each year and supports 74,000 FTE jobs.¹ Importantly, the vast majority of this spend and these jobs are located in rural areas. In Exmoor, for example, shooting makes up 95% of winter tourism to the area, contributing more than £30 million annually; this is more valuable than the combined contribution of agricultural subsidies to the area.

¹ PACEC, [The Value of Shooting](#), 2014

- This tourism is critical in ensuring that a myriad of services, from pubs and hotels to schools and post offices, are not just reliant on a summer season, but can continue to survive year-round.
- The positive impact on social well-being and mental health from shooting should not be underestimated, and these of course have knock on impacts on the economy. A recent PhD study suggested that the financial benefit to society of the exercise undertaken by beaters and pickers up involved in just driven grouse shooting is estimated at £547million per year.
- In addition, shooting plays a greater part in maintaining the landscape and biodiversity of the UK than any other activity, with over two thirds of rural land managed in connection with shooting activities. People who shoot contribute 3.9 million work-days on conservation every year: the equivalent of 16,000 full-time conservation jobs. This management allows increased and enhanced interaction with nature for all users.

Angling

- Angling makes a significant contribution to national strategic objectives in sport, the environment and the economy. It engages huge numbers of people – estimated to involve around 900,000 fishing in freshwater in England and Wales and around 750,000 people who fish in the sea every year in the UK.
- Sea angling had a total economic impact of £1.2bn, supporting 23,600 jobs in 2012; and freshwater angling in England in 2015 contributed £1.46 billion to the economy and supported 27,000 full-time equivalent jobs.
- There has been a decline in fishing licence sales since 2010 and government restrictions have meant a decline in marketing and other funding of the sport. The previous national angling strategy, *Fishing for Life*, was not properly implemented, funded or assessed.
- The Angling Trust, in its 2021 evidence to the Committee, noted that it had secured for the following two years £1.15m a year from the Environment Agency and £670,000 from Sport England to help angling's development. However, delivery of objectives will require considerable additional resources.
- There was a resurgence in angling during the pandemic with a 20% increase in rod licence sales, reversing the long-term trend noted above. Any future strategy for sport and recreation should support this upward trend.

Equestrian activities

- Hunts play an important role in the fabric of rural communities. There are over 200 registered packs of foxhounds, harriers and beagles. Hunts conduct over 12,000 days of lawful hunting activities each year, and hunt staff exercise hounds daily. There are approximately 40,000 people who are active hunt supporters.
- The economic value of the equestrian sector stands at £4.7 billion of consumer spending across a wide range of goods and services each year. This has increased from £4.3 billion in 2015. There are 27 million people in Britain with an interest in the equestrian industry.

- There has been an increase in the number of people who have ridden at least once in the past 12 months, to 3 million from 2.7 million in 2015. The number of regular riders – those who have ridden at least once a month for the past 12 months – has risen from 1.3 million in 2015 to 1.8 million.²
- Sadly, the equestrian sector struggles to receive funding from most local and county partnerships and committees. Most are focussed on traditional urban activity, such as team sport, athletics, gymnastics, swimming and gyms as an example. The equestrian sector, where there is a perception of wealth, is often not understood or considered.

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² BETA, [The National Equestrian Survey 2019](#)