

Never more relevant

I regret to say that I haven't walked in Lincolnshire since I joined the Ramblers walk around Great Britain to celebrate its 50th Jubilee in 1985. I walked a stretch of the Viking Way, and visited the Ramblers' church in Walesby. It was a joy to be back there again on Saturday on the walk led by Gary Beighton. The church has the famous window depicting walkers and cyclists, with Christ walking through the cornfields and the words: 'And it came to pass that he went through the cornfields on the Sabbath Day.' In Lincolnshire, 31 years ago and probably today, he would surely have found his path blocked—despite the efforts of those stalwart Ramblers: Brett Collier, Nev Cole and Tom Dagwell of treasured memory.

And that's where Walkers Are Welcome comes in. We work to get the paths around our towns in good order, reporting problems and doing practical work and encouraging people to walk them. It is now well known that walking is good for our health and good for the economy. We must persuade our governments that money spent to improve the conditions for walkers is truly an investment and that that to cut the path budget is a false economy. In our towns we need to provide some hard evidence of the benefits of Walkers Are Welcome status. Please gather facts and figures, even anecdotes, to show this and let us know.

We must chime with our governments' aims. In Wales this has been made easier. The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 puts a duty on public bodies to work for: a globally-responsible Wales, a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities and a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Walkers Are Welcome helps to achieve all of these.

Brexit has thrown everything into confusion, but there are opportunities too. The new agricultural-funding regime should include a generous pot of money for access. This can pay for new and improved access, and when landowners abuse their paths, their grant should be docked and the money added to the access pot.

In these uncertain times, we can look to our path network as something constant, reflecting our history and traditions. But our definitive maps are incomplete and we need to apply for the addition of unrecorded, historic paths before they are lost on 1 January 2026—less than ten years away. Rights-of-way user groups have organised training events run by experts Sarah Bucks and Phil Wadey. Chepstow Walkers Are Welcome helped to organise one last summer. There will be more next year, watch the Restoring the Record website. Walkers Are Welcome towns, who know their localities so well, can fill the gaps on the maps.

Now is the time to get alongside our elected representatives, to tell them what we do—for Walkers Are Welcome has never been more relevant.

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