

By email to: holyrood.park.consultation@hes.scot

Holyrood Park Education Centre
1 Queen's Drive
Edinburgh
EH8 8HG

18 December 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

Holyrood Park Strategic Plan consultation

Mountaineering Scotland is a membership organisation with more than 16,000 members and is the recognised representative organisation for hill walkers, climbers, mountaineers and snowsports tourers who live in Scotland or who enjoy Scotland's mountains. We represent, support and promote Scottish mountaineering, and provide training and information to mountain users for safety, self-reliance and the enjoyment of our mountain environment.

Our interests lie generally with the potential effect of various proposals on the special qualities of mountain landscapes, and on mountaineering interests, especially along routes to mountain summits and climbing crags. Mountaineering Scotland supports activities that lead towards creating a richer and wilder environment which address both the climate crisis and biodiversity crisis, while also for the benefit of people.

As a representative body for mountaineering interests, we are unable to complete your online consultation as the format favours individual responses. We have encouraged our members who have an interest in Holyrood Park to participate in your questionnaire.

We note your intention to adhere to a clear message and purpose, and to that effect we will answer your three questions in the questionnaire which will lead to the refinement of the Plan.

1. How do people currently use the Park?

The detail of current use will vary according to each individual's life situations, but in generally walkers and climbers, and snowsports enthusiasts when the weather is right, will use different parts of the Park for their activities, at different times throughout the year.

For climbers, most will currently head to South Quarry for bouldering, but there are some who will climb and scramble on other outcrops. More detail on where these rock faces are is available in climbing guides. It is important to recognise that not all exposed rock in the Park is suitable for climbing, as it offers the climber no protection or belays.

Walkers will tend to follow existing trodden routes to summit and ridge viewpoints, although people will walk across the whole Park area, depending on the slope and vegetation allowing. Path management to limit erosion and protect the environment is an essential and sensitive issue, while retaining a wild feel of the Park in a city context.

Snowsports enthusiasts, skiers and snowboarders, are limited in opportunity to the few days each year of sufficient snowfall but will move through the Park depending on ground conditions.

2. What do people perceive the current issues and priorities for the Park are, and where do they wish to see improvement and action?

From our perspective of walking, climbing and skiing, the big current issue is the closure for five years of the Radical Road and South Quarry. We accept that Historic Environment Scotland has a Duty of Care for the public visiting Holyrood Park, but we disagree, especially with respect to climbing in South Quarry, about the proportionality of this action as a response to the assessment of hazard from loose rock.

Another issue that is of concern to our members is the outdated permit system that prohibits climbing on the Park, except for South Quarry. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 provides for recreational climbing as a legitimate right of access in Scotland, as long as it is exercised responsibly, and a permit for climbing in a public space runs counter to the legislation and guidance as set out in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. We question the legal premise for maintaining restrictions through the Park Regulations, which were not reviewed when the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 was enacted.

Our opinion is that this right to climb, free from permits, should be extended to other rock outcrops in Holyrood Park, especially the Long Quarry area, the same as in other parts of Scotland. The advice in the Official Guide to Climbing in Holyrood Park, produced by the Park Ranger Service, is otherwise an excellent guide to responsible behaviour while climbing.

Being a large open space in the middle of a large city, there will be a need for HES to regulate activity which is damaging or socially unacceptable. To address concerns, we urge HES to convene a stakeholders group or forum, and consult on devising and communicating means of managing public access which are suited to the modern environment, and in conjunction with City of Edinburgh Council make management regulations, or byelaws as a measure of last resort, to deal with identified issues.

3. How do people see the role of Holyrood Park in the future and in the context of wider Edinburgh?


Holyrood Park is seen and enjoyed as a much-valued landscape and informal recreational resource within the city, free for public access in accordance with the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Access and recreation are integrated with land management and natural processes, and a Park Ranger Service is an essential component of managing this.

Visitor management measures are planned, negotiated, and implemented through engagement and communication with communities of place, and of interest and participation.



Yours sincerely


|

Davie Black
Access & Conservation Officer
Mountaineering Scotland

T: 07555 769325

E: access@mountaineering.scot

