

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET – 20TH FEBRUARY 2008

DRAFT CORE PATH PLAN

Report by Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Cabinet on work carried out so far in the development of the Core Path Plan and to seek approval to undertake a formal consultation exercise for the Draft Core Path Plan.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The East Ayrshire Outdoor Access Strategy (Approved by Community Services Committee 29 May 2002) aims to develop :

" A series of well planned, co-ordinated and used path networks which will provide connections between communities, meet the social and health needs of communities, realise the area's tourism potential, promote more sustainable transport choices and support economic and environmental regeneration."

- 2.2 In 2003, East Ayrshire Council was awarded over £2.5 million to develop a path network in the Coalfield area of East Ayrshire. This Outdoor Access Project is already showing a significant contribution to a number of policy agendas including competitive locations, environmental improvements, economic benefits through a healthy working population, environmental education, interpretation of heritage, improved perception of EA Coalfield area and regeneration of derelict land championed by opencast operators, RSPB and SNH.

With over 50,000 people in the first year using the River Ayr Way and qualitative assessments reporting positive experiences, there has been a marked improvement in people's perception of the East Ayrshire Coalfield area. This is compounded by the number of tourism business reporting a significant improvement in turnover.

This success of the River Ayr Way is mirrored throughout the path network with the following figures being recorded between June 2006 and June 2007:

Woodroad Park	16,000+
Coalfield Cycle Route	40,000+
Doon Valley Path Network	60,000+
Irvine Valley Routes	20,000+

Throughout 2007, external funding has been attracted to develop a number of other routes throughout East Ayrshire. The Stewarton Local Path Network has received money from Sustrans to improve the links around the town to make safer travel to each of the schools. These routes also contribute to the path network being delivered in partnership with East Ayrshire Woodlands and Stewarton Woodland Action Team.

Similar funding was received to create a cycle route link from Kilmarnock to Hurlford and then to upgrade the dismantled railway line from Hurlford to Galston. This has made access to the already successful Irvine Valley Trails more readily available to people out with the Irvine Valley and connect the Irvine Valley to the National Cycle Network. Links are now being developed to link these trails to the River Ayr Way.

Following the approval of the Whitelee Forest Windfarm, the local authorities of East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire have entered into an agreement to jointly employ an Access Project Officer for Whitelee Forest. This will allow the action plan for the area to be implemented over the next few years and will ensure that the neighbouring communities benefit from the project.

Over the last year, East Ayrshire Council has been working with Kilmaurs Community Council to develop an Historical Town Trail. This route is in place and signage and interpretation will be installed early in 2008 with a launch event being planned for early Spring.

The access team are also working with a number of community councils including Crosshouse, Catrine and Muirkirk to develop path network in specific areas.

2.3 Under Section 17 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, Local Authorities must draw up a draft Core Path Plan by February 2008, which will provide the basic framework of routes sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area. The East Ayrshire Core Path Plan is being prepared by East Ayrshire Council in partnership with the East Ayrshire Outdoor Access Forum. The main objective of the Core Path Plan is to develop a document detailing a network of paths giving sufficient access for each community and is achieved through extensive consultation in the following stages:

- Informal consultation with interest groups, landowning and managing groups and the general public. This stage has been carried out in partnership with North Ayrshire Council through the development of a Core Path Plan Toolkit. The toolkit was developed to facilitate an audit of paths throughout East and North Ayrshire and included path survey sheets, user survey sheets and maps of the area;
- Development of criteria to select which paths in the network will become candidate core paths. This is done in partnership with the East Ayrshire Outdoor Access Forum;
- Informal consultation over the candidate core paths;
- Production of the Draft Core Path Plan; and
- Formal consultation of the Draft Core Path Plan.

The plan will take account of all routes throughout the local authority area as well as routes which cross the boundary of neighbouring authorities.

The list of criteria for route selection was developed in partnership with the Outdoor Access Forum and is:

1. Level of demand within the community (from public consultations)
2. Links to wider path networks and other communities (including waterways and cross-border links)
3. Creation of circular routes

4. Provision of all abilities paths
5. Opportunities for multi use
6. Links to local interests of natural, cultural and built heritage (including amenities)
7. Managing the environmental impact of access
8. Opportunities for community regeneration and economic development e.g. tourism
9. Possibility of avoiding or mitigating land management conflicts
10. Value for money

2.4 Once a path is included in the Core Path Plan, it will receive greater protection within the planning system. The Core Path Plan gives us the opportunity to raise public awareness of the range and condition of the path network in East Ayrshire.

3. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

3.1 The East Ayrshire Core Path Plan is likely to have significant environmental impacts and is a land use document that will outline the existing provision of outdoor access to land and inland water and will guide future development in order to protect or enhance this provision. Therefore, an environmental assessment under Section 5(3) of the Act is required. As the East Ayrshire Core Path Plan is a qualifying plan or programme, it avoided the requirement to undertake screening as defined in Section 9 of the Act. East Ayrshire Council made the determination that the Core Path Plan required an environmental assessment on 1st November 2006 and complied with the advertisement requirements in Section 10 of the Act.

The overall purpose of the environmental assessment of the East Ayrshire Core Path Plan is to identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects, positive or negative, that the core path plan may have on the environment.

The act requires the environmental assessment process to be fully integrated with the development of the East Ayrshire Core Path Plan, with both processes running in parallel and being clearly defined. It is recognised that the environmental assessment will influence the detailed provisions of the East Ayrshire Core Path Plan and vice versa. However, it should be noted that the environmental report is a tool used to aid the decision-making process and will be used as such to determine the final contents of the East Ayrshire Core Path Plan.

4. PROGRESS TOWARDS THE PREPARATION OF THE DRAFT CORE PATH PLAN

4.1 A comprehensive path audit has been carried out to inform the Core Path Plan. This audit has been the subject of extensive public consultation to identify the entire East Ayrshire path network.

In order to understand the current provision of routes through East Ayrshire, it was essential to carry out an extensive path audit. It was deemed difficult to carry out this audit using traditional forms of consultation and surveying due to a lack of resources. Therefore, with the assistance of Scottish Natural Heritage and the Paths for All Partnership, an Outdoor Access Toolkit was developed in partnership with North Ayrshire Council.

The toolkits were developed to provide local groups and organisations with all of the information and resources needed to identify routes in their local area and any ideas for linkages and extensions to these networks. Members of the East Ayrshire Outdoor Access Forum and land owning sectors also used these toolkits with their interest groups to enable them to contribute to the process.

The toolkits have been shortlisted for a Scottish Association Quality in Planning Award.

Following thorough consideration of each path including a physical audit and a qualitative assessment using pre-determined criteria, candidate core paths were selected to inform the Interim Draft Core Path Plan. East Ayrshire Council has undertaken a further informal consultation exercise over these candidate core paths and from this exercise the Draft Core Path Plan has been produced. The Draft Core Path Plan will be placed on the Council's website.

5. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EAST AYRSHIRE CORE PATH PLAN

- 5.1 The informal consultation of the candidate core paths ended on the 25th January 2008. This has allowed further routes or comments to be taken into account in the preparation of the draft Core Path Plan. Once approved the draft Core Path Plan will be made available on the following websites:

www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk

www.theriverayrway.rog

www.ayrshirepaths.co.uk

www.deancastle.com

It will also be made available in hard copy in all public buildings.

It is intended to begin the formal consultation of the draft Core Path Plan on the 1st April 2008. With a statutory consultation period of 12 weeks, the consultation period will end on the 24th June 2008.

Subject to objections and public enquiries, the Core Path Plan should be ready for approval by 3rd September 2008.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Nil

7. LEGAL AUTHORITY / IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Production of a Core Path Plan is a duty of the local authority under Section 17 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Local Authorities must draw up a draft Core Paths Plan by February 2008, which will provide the basic framework of routes sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area.

8. COMMUNITY PLAN / POLICY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The project is informed by the East Ayrshire Outdoor Access Strategy, the Community Plan and local/national strategies relating to tourism and economic development, biodiversity, health promotion, health inequalities and social inclusion.

9. CONCLUSIONS

9.1 East Ayrshire Countryside Services has made significant progress in implementing the East Ayrshire Outdoor Access Strategy, particularly by ensuring that outdoor access not only meets the traditional recreational agenda, but also has a significant role in developing the tourism potential of East Ayrshire and supporting healthy lifestyles and social inclusion.

9.2 The East Ayrshire Outdoor Access Strategy continues to attract major levels of external funds to deliver both strategic and local level projects.

9.3 The Draft Core Path Plan will comply with duties under the Land Reform Scotland Act (2003) and will be made widely available for public consultation in April 2008.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (i) approve the formal public consultation on the draft core path plan process as outlined in the report and
- (ii) otherwise note the content of this report;

William Stafford
Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

WS/JAG/AF
6th February 2008

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. East Ayrshire Draft Core Path Plan
2. East Ayrshire Outdoor Access Strategy

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone (01563) 554750 and ask for Peter Coldwell, Outdoor Access Officer

Implementation Officer – (john.griffiths@east-ayrshire.gov.uk)