

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 24TH MAY 2006

EAST AYRSHIRE COALFIELD SIP OUTDOOR ACCESS PROJECT - THE RIVER AYR WAY

Report by Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the progress of the implementation of the River Ayr Way and proposals for the launch to be held on the 9th to 11th of June 2006.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The East Ayrshire Outdoor Access Strategy (Approved by Community Services Committee on 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 project contributed 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 East Ayrshire Coalfield area and regeneration of derelict land.

- 2.3 The River Ayr Way is the flagship access project for the whole of Ayrshire with the potential to attract many visitors to the area, contributing to the tourism potential and economic development of East Ayrshire. East Ayrshire benefits from three further core routes; The Scottish Coal Cycle Route (Dalmellington to Coalburn); The Doon Valley Route and the Lugar Water Route.

- 2.4 The River Ayr Way was shortlisted for a Scottish Thistle Award in 2005 and is nominated for a further 3 in 2006. The Scottish Thistle Awards were established to reward professionalism and innovation in Scottish tourism.

3. PROGRESS TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RIVER AYR WAY

- 3.1 The River Ayr Way has been divided into 13 sections to ease implementation. Sections 1-9 are in East Ayrshire and go from Glenbuck to Barskimming. All have been developed in partnership with local communities and through management agreements with the landowners. Only section 9 through Barskimming is still being negotiated.

3.2 The sections from Barskimming to Ayr Harbour are within South Ayrshire. However, their negotiation and implementation is being led by the East Ayrshire Outdoor Access Unit to ensure consistency along the entire route.

3.3 Implementation progress is as follows:

- Sections 1 – 4 (Glenbuck to Garpel Estate) are complete.
- Section 5 (Garpel Estate to Sorn) contractors are on site and work is expected to be complete by the end of May.
- Sections 6 & 7 (Sorn to Haughford Bridge) are complete.
- Section 8 (Ballochmyle Gorge) contractors are on site and work is expected to be complete by the end of May. This is an existing section, which is programmed for upgrading works to bring it to the same standard as the rest of the route.
- Section 9 (Barskimming) is still being negotiated with the landowner. However, there is an existing route which could be utilized as part of the River Ayr Way.
- Sections 10 & 11 (Barskimming to Stair) are complete.
- Section 12 (Stair to Auchincruive) is near completion.
- Section 13 (Auchincruive to Ayr) is complete.

3.4 The development of local path networks around the villages of Muirkirk, Catrine and Sorn and their associated interpretation and signage is complete. The Mauchline Local Path Network is scheduled for completion in early June.

3.5 Local path networks are also being developed in Tarbolton, Mossblown, Annbank, Auchincruive and Coylton as part of the overall River Ayr Way project.

3.6 A tourist information pack to accompany the River Ayr Way has also been produced. This includes information about all the local path networks, history of the area, things to see and do, places to stay and eat and so on. This will compliment the interpretation which is being installed throughout the network to give a better insight into the rich natural and social heritage of the area. The tourist information pack will also allow us to monitor the use of the route and the experience of the visitors to the area.

3.7 Six people counters have also been installed along the route to monitor numbers and to identify 'hotspots'.

4. THE LAUNCH OF THE RIVER AYR WAY

4.1 The River Ayr is being launched over the weekend of the 9th, 10th and 11th of June, with an exciting programme of events. Fred MacAulay, Broadcaster, is officially launching the route on the 10th June by starting the first 100 walkers on the two day trip.

4.2 The programme of events includes:

- Friday 9th June – River Ayr Light Show at Ayr Gorge Woodland, Failford
River Ayr Beer Festival at the Failford Inn
- Saturday 10th June – Launch of the River Ayr Way at Glenbuck Loch
100 walkers walking the first 22 miles (33km)
Tour of Glenbuck Loch
Landowner and partner lunch at the Railway Hotel
Interviews with Fred MacAuley
River Ayr Light Show at Ayr Gorge Woodland, Failford
River Ayr Beer Festival at the Failford Inn
- Sunday 11th June - 100 walkers walking the final 22 miles (33km)
Country Fair at Auchincruive
Closing ceremony and presentation to first 100 walkers at the Horizon Hotel, Ayr
Carnival in Catrine.

4.3 A video of the opening events has been commissioned and a 30 minute promotional film and 5 minute loop will be produced for use in the marketing of the new attraction.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Funding for the River Ayr Way has been secured from a wide range of partners and funding bodies.

6. LEGAL AUTHORITY/ IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Outdoor Access Strategy and the development of path networks support the implementation of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 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.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 This Outdoor Access Unit has made significant progress in implementing this project, which will be the first Source to Sea route in Scotland. It has attracted considerable interest from VisitScotland and other national and local agencies. The launch of the River Ayr Way will improve the range of tourism attractions available to visitors to East Ayrshire and encourage more people to visit new areas while also providing new amenities for local communities and supporting the promotion of healthier lifestyles.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of this report.

William Stafford
Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

WS/JAG/AF

11th May 2006

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. East Ayrshire Outdoor Access Strategy

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone (01563) 554748 and ask for Anneke Freel, Outdoor Access Project Manager.

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