

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 13TH SEPTEMBER 2006

EAST AYRSHIRE COALFIELD SIP OUTDOOR ACCESS PROJECT - THE COALFIELD OUTDOOR ACCESS PROJECT

Report by Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Community Services Committee on the progress of the implementation of the Coalfield Outdoor Access Project and to report on the launch of the River Ayr Way which, was held on the 9th to 11th of June 2006

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 will contribute 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 championed by opencast operators, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Scottish Natural Heritage.

- 2.3 The project involves the development of 4 core routes:

- **The Scottish Coal Cycle Route:** this will be a 66km between Dalmellington and Coalburn
- **The Doon Valley Route:** links the communities of Dalmellington, Patna, Waterside and Rankinston as well as linking to important heritage sites such as Loch Doon and the Galloway Forest
- **The Lugar Water Route:** will link the people of Ochiltree and Drongan to the River Ayr as well as providing a network around the beautiful Auchinleck Estate.
- **The River Ayr Way:** Scotland's first 'Source to Sea' medium distance route that begins at Glenbuck Loch and follows the River Ayr to Ayr Harbour. This 66km linear route is complimented by four local path networks in East Ayrshire, in the communities of Muirkirk, Sorn, Catrine and Mauchline.

The River Ayr will be the flagship project for the whole of Ayrshire with the potential to attract 80,000 visitors to the area, contributing to the tourism potential and economic development of East Ayrshire.

3. PROGRESS TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COALFIELD OUTDOOR ACCESS UNIT

- 3.1 The Scottish Coal Cycle Route is complete between Cumnock and Muirkirk. The final section between Dalmellington and Cumnock is being negotiated with landowners and should be completed by December 2006. The line is dependent on a number of other developments in the area, including proposals for Piper Hill at Skares and Dunaskin. Signage and interpretation is being designed and will be installed once the route has been fully constructed.

Table 1: People counter figures from Scottish Coal Cycle Route

People Counter Location	Installation Date	Date of most recent count	Latest figure
Lord Bute's Walk, Cumnock	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	24655
Woodroad Park, Cumnock	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	1753

- 3.2 The Doon Valley Path Network is complete and was launched in March 2006. The information pack has been widely distributed. Further developments in this network are ongoing through work with Craigengillan Estates, Forestry Commission Scotland and local landowners applying to the Land Management Contract Scheme offered by the Scottish Environment and Rural Affairs Department to improve access to agricultural land.
- 3.3 People counters installed in specific locations throughout the network indicate that the routes are very popular.

Table 2: People counter figures from Doon Valley paths.

People Counter Location	Installation Date	Date of most recent count	Latest figure
Muck Water Path, Dalmellington	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	9953
Hollybush Estate	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	1894
Ness Glen, Dalmellington	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	7658
Patna Bridle route	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	351

- 3.4 The Lugar Water Network through Auchinleck Estate is complete except for a bridge over the Lugar Water. The location of the bridge is being discussed with landowners.
- 3.5 The River Ayr Way is now open and is proving to be very popular. Early figures taken from the 8 people counters installed along the route indicate that the figures may exceed the original forecast of between 40,000 and 80,000 visitors a year on any individual sections. Particular hotspots are Ayr Gorge Woodlands, Failford to Stair, Sorn to Catrine and Glenbuck.

Table 3: People counter figures from River Ayr Way

People Counter Location	Installation Date	Date of most recent count	Latest figure
Ayr Gorge, Failford	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	34410
Glenbuck to Muirkirk	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	6548
Walkers' Car Park, Muirkirk	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	10688
Glenbuck	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	12949
Airds Moss	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	6953
Sorn to Catrine	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	12589
Failford to Stair	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	12344
Catrine Local Path Network	31 st March 2006	14 th July 2006	11832

All sections of the route are now fully constructed except for the sections listed below that are currently under construction and due for completion before the end of September or sections where the final route is still being agreed with the landowners. It is anticipated that these sections will be agreed and implemented by the end of October. It should be stressed that the entire route is walkable regardless of its status and that temporary routes have been signed until final routes are installed.

- Section 9 (Barskimming) has been agreed with the landowners and the final route is being prepared in order to let the contract.
- Section 12 (Stair to Auchincruive) is near completion. The remaining part to be implemented is through Privick Mill, which should be implemented by the end of September.

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 has been 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. This pack is being sold through East Ayrshire libraries, the Dean Castle Country Park, Ayr Tourist Information Centre and South Ayrshire library headquarters.

4. THE LAUNCH OF THE RIVER AYR WAY

4.1 The River Ayr Way was launched over the weekend of the 9th, 10th and 11th of June, with an exciting programme of events. Fred MacAulay officially launched the route on the 10th June by starting the first 100 walkers on the two day trip. 86 of the registered 100 walkers started the route on the Saturday and 78 completed it on the Sunday.

The Light show at Ayr Gorge Woodland on the 9th and 10th of June, which was complimented by a Beer Festival at the Failford Inn, promoting the River Ayr Way Ale, was attended by over 600 people. Visitors came from throughout Ayrshire and from as far as Glasgow to participate in this event.

It has contributed greatly to raising the awareness of the River Ayr Way in general, but of Ayr Gorge Woodland in particular and numbers using the Gorge have increased significantly over the last few months.

The landowner and partners' celebration lunch on Saturday 10th June was well attended and landowners were very positive at the direction the project is taking.

Also, on the Saturday, Fred Macaulay walked sections of the route, recording footage for the River Ayr Way DVD. This DVD is now ready and will be shown on the East Ayrshire Council internet site to promote the route.

On Sunday 11th June, a Country Fair was held at Auchincruive, followed by a Carnival in Catrine. The Country Fair was attended by over 3000 people and the Carnival at Catrine was attended by over 800 people. The event in Catrine was well received by the people of Catrine, but also attracted many visitors, including some of the successful walkers doing the route for the first time.

- 4.2 Since the launch of the River Ayr Way, the Outdoor Access Unit has received numerous enquiries and requests for the information pack. The mailing list for the river Ayr Way now sits at just under 750 people. This includes people from all over Scotland and several customers from England and Northern Ireland. The people counters and customer questionnaires will be monitored regularly to get a picture of the numbers and the range of people using the route.

5. PROJECTS OUTWITH THE COALFIELD PATH NETWORK

- 5.1 Confirmation of an external grant of £285,000 has just been received from Sustrans Scotland for the extension of the National Cycle Network through Kilmarnock to the Irvine Valley. This route will follow the River Irvine and provide a safe off road, high quality route for people of all ages and abilities. It is hoped that the River Irvine Path will eventually link to Gatehead. Construction is currently underway on phase 1 of the project from Galston to Hurlford. This route will be fully constructed by June 2007.
- 5.2 After the successful negotiation of the section 75 agreement for Whitelee Forest Windfarm, the Access Planning Group has now been established. This group is made up of representatives from East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire Local Authorities, community groups, Scottish Power, Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. Construction of the path network and associated facilities is anticipated to begin in 2008.

6. SUSTAINABILITY OF THE COALFIELD ACCESS PROJECT AND THE WIDER PATH NETWORK

- 6.1 In order to build on the success of the Coalfield Access Project and to ensure sustainability of all access projects, the Outdoor Access Team are working on proposals to improve access to and development of local greenspaces and to create links between community woodlands, parks and other openspaces with the aim of creating a network of well promoted and easily accessible openspaces around each community throughout East Ayrshire.

The new proposals also include continued management of the River Ayr Way as a tourist attraction. This project aims to pull together many existing initiatives and develop new ideas into a strategic framework for openspace development and management.

7. EAST AYRSHIRE CORE PATH PLAN

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 The plan will be developed through extensive consultation with communities, landowners, access users and all other interested parties. To facilitate this process, a toolkit has been developed by the East and North Ayrshire Councils to enable local organisations to contribute to the process. This includes all the information and resources needed to identify routes and any ideas for linkage or extension of these networks. These can be utilised by a wide range of organisations.
- 7.3 The toolkit will ensure that the information obtained is based on local knowledge and will be factually correct. Landowners, communities, agencies and access users can use the toolkit with limited involvement from the Access staff. It will ensure that the process is balanced and inclusive, as all interest groups will be consulted in the same manner.
- 7.4 The questionnaires will enable the Councils to build up a comprehensive database of information, which will be useful for other access related works as well as the Core Paths Plan. At the first stage users will be asked to identify potential path linkages but with the proviso that this does not necessarily mean that these routes will be created. This stage is currently underway and toolkits have been distributed widely. Closing date for this first stage is November 30th 2006. The Core Path Plan Toolkit is on the agenda for the current round of Local Committee Meetings to raise awareness of the initiative and encourage participation in the process.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Nil

9 LEGAL AUTHORITY/ IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Nil

10. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 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.

11. CONCLUSIONS

- 11.1 This Outdoor Access Unit has made significant progress in implementing this Coalfield Access Project, which amounts to 358km of path network. 342km of this network is now in place. It has attracted interest from VisitScotland and other national and local agencies.
- 11.2 The River Ayr Way is attracting a significant number of visitors to the area and providing an excellent resource for the local communities within the catchment area of the network.
- 11.3 Planning for the future sustainability of the outdoor access initiatives and the development of Core Path Plans is well underway and progress will be reported back to committee in due course.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-
- (i) note the contents of this report.

William Stafford
Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

WS/JAG/AF

22nd August 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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