

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL
COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 7 FEBRUARY 2001

COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS UNIT

Report by Director of Community Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval for the establishment of a Countryside Access Unit comprising two Countryside Access Officers and an additional Countryside Ranger post, subject to financial support from Scottish Natural Heritage being approved.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In 1997 Scottish Natural Heritage was asked by Government to review the legal arrangements for access in Scotland and to make recommendations which would be for the then proposed Scottish Parliament to consider and implement.
- 2.2 The main reasons for modernising the law were as follows:
- (i) Creating clarity in the law for all
 - (ii) Creating a presumption for access
 - (iii) Giving open-air recreation a higher profile
 - (iv) Providing a framework for action and resources
 - (v) Serving a wider policy agenda
- 2.3 The key proposal is that Scotland's tradition of tolerance towards public access be confirmed as a statutory right of access to all land and inland water, exercised responsibly, for informal recreation and passage. This would extend to mountains and moorland, woods and forest, farmland and rivers and lochs, but not any building or the area immediately surrounding it, such as a garden or farmyard.
- 2.4 The Government proposes that consultation on the new legislation will begin in early February 2001. The full Land Reform Bill is a measure which will be both complex and contentious, and its passage through Parliament may take some time. It is not expected to be passed until early 2002.

2.5 Councils will have new duties to:

- (i) Establish at least one local access forum
- (ii) To achieve complete coverage of their areas
- (iii) Facilitate and plan for access in their areas through an access strategy
- (iv) Identify and create a public record of the core path networks for their areas
- (v) Ensure that its core path network is well defined, accessible, protected and managed

2.6 The Director of Development Services who holds some responsibilities for countryside access has been consulted in the development of this report.

- (i) Statutory responsibilities relating to rights of ways and planning powers.
- (ii) Project initiatives linked to tourism programmes (in particular Irvine Valley and Doon Valley) and Local Plan.
- (iii) Statutory responsibilities of Roads in relation to public roads and footpaths.
- (iv) Projects development by Roads in relation to cycle way and footpath networks.

3. CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Scottish Natural Heritage will receive additional funding to implement the new legislation. Their budget will increase from £42 million to £55.6 million by 2003/4.

Local Authorities will also receive an additional £50 million over the next 3 years to carry out environmental works which will include the development of improved access arrangements.

Scottish Natural Heritage envisage Local Authorities creating additional posts to implement the legislation. At the present time there are 17 access officers in Scotland with a further 9 in the pipeline. Early estimates indicate a further 76 posts will be required over the next 3 years. This equates to approximately 2 posts per authority.

Additional Countryside Rangers will also be required to resolve issues on the ground. Estimates indicate a further 64 posts will be created in Local Authorities.

Scottish Natural Heritage will also require a further 20 posts to deal with access issues.

3.2 The role of the access officers has been discussed in some detail with Scottish Natural Heritage and the Paths for All Partnership. The main role of the posts would be as follows:

- (i) Co-ordinate the development of an Access Strategy for East Ayrshire.
- (ii) To support the work of an Access Steering Group whose membership would include representatives of the main funding bodies – Scottish Natural Heritage, Enterprise Ayrshire, Health Board and Ayrshire Tourist Board.
- (iii) To develop a Local Access Forum which would report back to the Access Steering Group. This would comprise of Local Authority Staff, National Farmers Union, Scottish Landowners Federation, Path for all Partnership , Ramblers Association, etc.
- (iv) The development of Core Path Networks through consultation with local communities, land managers and the access forum.
- (v) Provide access opportunities for specialist users such as cyclists and horse riders.
- (vi) To establish funding partnerships that ensures the implementation of proposals.
- (vii) To prioritise work programmes for the maintenance and management of the Core Path Networks.
- (viii) To promote access through various media to members of the public and to East Ayrshire Staff

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The two Countryside Access Officers would be employed on salary scale AP5 £21,036 to £22,959. The additional Countryside Ranger would be AP1/2 starting at £13,164 to £15,717. These salaries are consistent with SNH recommendations.

4.2 Based on these salaries the total project costs including office and travel costs would be as follows:

Salaries (including NI and Superannuation)

Countryside Access Officer x2 @ AP5	£49,518
Countryside Ranger AP1/2	£15,494

Administration/Office Costs

Recruitment	£ 1,000
Accommodation/Heating/Light, etc	£ 2,000
Administration Support	£ 5,000
Office Supplies	£ 2,000

Other Costs

Training	£ 1,000
Travel – van hire, etc.	£ 5,200

Total £81,212

- 4.3 Scottish Natural Heritage would provide financial support for 3 years with 75% funding in year one, 65% in year two and 53% in year 3.

This would be broken down as:-

Grant from SNH	£60,909
Other External Funding	£10,000
Existing budget (in kind)	£10,000

- 4.4 The posts would initially be for a three year period, and would be reviewed in due course. As the SNH grant reduces additional external funding will be sought to meet any shortfall that cannot be met by the Council.

5. LEGAL AUTHORITY/IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 These proposals would assist the Council in meeting the new requirements of the Land Reform Bill.

6. TRADE UNIONS

- 6.1 The Trade Unions support the proposal and will be kept fully informed as the bidding process progresses.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The appointment of these posts is required to implement the new access legislation.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 These posts are essential if East Ayrshire Council is to produce an Access Strategy and create an Access Forum in time for the enactment of the new legislation at the beginning of 2002. Half of Scottish Local Authorities have completed their Access Strategy or are working towards it. East Ayrshire Council

has basic information about the current path networks but does not currently have the resources to complete the strategic planning process required.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 It is recommended that the committee:-

- (i) approve in principle the establishment of a Countryside Access Unit;
- (i) note the application for funding to Scottish Natural Heritage outlined in 4.3 of this report;
- (ii) remit to the Director of Community Services to provide regular progress reports on the performance of the project;
- (iii) refer this report to the personnel & property Sub-Committee of the Policy and Resources Committee in respect of their interest; and
- (iv) otherwise note the contents of this report

William Stafford
Director of Community Services

WS/ASM/BR
4 December 2000

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Scottish Natural Heritage Magazine No.18
2. Report on SNH Pilot Projects Workshop, Nov. 2000
3. Countryside Recreation and Access Strategies
4. Creating a Path Network – a guide to local action

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone 01563 576264 and ask for Andrew Scott Martin, Country Park Manager.

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AGENDA