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## North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership

### Briefing Note No. 2:

### Outdoor Access and Community Planning

March 2005

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The following paper provides a summary of the progress made in relation to outdoor access in the last two years and identifies the links between the implementation of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, outdoor access development and the community planning process.

#### **Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003**

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 was given Royal Assent on 25th February 2003. Part 1 of this Act which establishes the right of responsible access for walking, horse riding, cycling and to inland water for non-motorised activities, came into force on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2005.

The Act identifies a number of new statutory obligations for Local Authorities including:

- The duty to uphold and protect access rights
- The formation of at least one Local Outdoor Access Forum
- The development of a Core Path Plan

The Access Officers are responsible for implementing the Council's obligations under the Act and have been in post since August 2002. To date the Officers have focussed on developing the Outdoor Access Forum, Outdoor Access Strategy and developing local path projects. The following provides an overview of the progress made to date.

#### **North Ayrshire Outdoor Access Forum**

Each Local Authority is obliged under the Act to set up at least one Local Outdoor Access Forum. The main functions of which are to advise the Council on the exercise of access rights, the development of a core path plan and to offer assistance in disputes about access rights. The Forum brings together all parties with an interest in developing and managing access to advise the Local Authority with their work on access and paths projects. It provides a mechanism to influence the future of access in North Ayrshire and was involved throughout the stages of the development of the Access Strategy.

The Act requires that Forums be composed of persons appointed by the local authority, to ensure a reasonable balance of:

- Communities - Community Councils, voluntary services, amenity groups, etc.
- Land owners / managers - individual owners, Water Board and the Forestry Commission, etc.
- Access Users - walkers, cyclists, canoeists, horse-riders, etc.
- Agencies - Local Health Board, Local Tourist Boards, etc.

The first step towards the formation of the Outdoor Access Forum for North Ayrshire was made by way of the initial stakeholder meeting in February 2003 at Ardrossan Civic Centre at which, people were invited to become part of the Forum. The Forum was developed following the guidelines illustrated in "Local Access Forum - A guide to good practice" produced by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Paths for All Partnership (PfAP) and utilising feedback from the initial stakeholder meeting. This advises on a balanced approach to Forum structure and proposes that the Forum should be open to everyone with an interest in local outdoor access.

The guidelines also suggest that a smaller Core Group of between ten and fifteen representatives be formed from the Forum. This should form the business part of the Forum, be accountable and report back to the main Forum. The formation of this smaller group enables active participation and meaningful discussion and ensures that the Forum can operate effectively. The Core Group was then developed at the first meeting of the whole Forum in May 2003. Forum members were informed of the intention to seek nominations prior to the meeting and were invited to withdraw into their four categories and decide on nominations for representatives and substitutes.

The Core Group consists of the following balance of representatives:

- Communities 3 representatives
- Land owners / managers 4 representatives
- Access Users 4 representatives
- Agencies 3 representatives
- Chairperson 1 representative (from North Ayrshire Council)

This Core Group is considered to fulfil the function of the Statutory Forum under the terms of the Land Reform legislation. The Chair of the wider Forum is Councillor David Munn and the Chair of the Core Group is Councillor Donald Reid. The wider Forum meets annually and the Core Group meets more regularly, around four to six times a year. Forum meetings provide a platform for discussion, sharing of information and the development of understanding of different points of view.

### **North Ayrshire Outdoor Access Strategy**

The production of an outdoor access strategy is a key stage in the translation of the Act into a local context. It has been recognised for some time that these Strategies are an invaluable tool for outdoor access planning across Local Authorities as a whole. They provide a framework for reviewing the existing situation in terms of provision, use, policy and resources and are a means for agreeing and co-ordinating priorities for future access development.

Outdoor Access Strategies are regarded as partnership documents, providing a means of bringing together a wide range of organisations with an involvement in access planning and implementation. Outdoor access has an impact on a wide range of policies and agendas. It is therefore essential to ensure that the Access Strategy is coherent and that is effectively 'owned' not only by the Council, but also by all of the stakeholders with a role to play in access planning, development and management.

The Access Officers, in partnership with the Core Group of the Forum have now produced the North Ayrshire Outdoor Access Strategy, which was adopted by the Council in September 2004. This provides a vision and action plans as to how to shape the planning and development of access within North Ayrshire. It highlights the ways in which access can benefit everyday life, not only by providing recreational resources but also through a wide range of mechanisms. It provides a framework for reviewing the existing situation in terms of provision, use, policy and resources and a means for agreeing and co-ordinating priorities for future access.

The main issues for outdoor access in North Ayrshire as identified by the strategy are:

- Economic development
- Education
- Environmental regeneration
- Health
- Social inclusion
- Sustainable Transport
- Recreation
- Tourism development

These obviously mirror a number of the key issues for the Community Plan. It is essential that the Outdoor Access Strategy is not viewed as a stand-alone document but as a mechanism to enable the achievement of the aims. Further information on the strategy is available from the Council's website [www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/outdooraccess](http://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/outdooraccess) and it is envisaged that the Strategy will be formally launched in March at the next wider Forum meeting.

## **Core Path Planning**

Local Authorities are obliged to draw up a system of paths, which are sufficient to provide the public with reasonable access throughout the area by February 2008. The Guidance for Local Authorities and National Parks on the Act states that the network of paths within Core Path Plan should be:

- Suitable for all types of users
- Appropriately surfaced depending on the location
- Sign posted at key access points
- Waymarked at strategic points throughout the network.
- Provide unimpeded access therefore all access control mechanisms should provide multi-user access

The development of the Core Path Plan involves a high level of public consultation as under the Act the Council is required to consult with the Forum, local communities, SNH and any other people that it thinks fit. The guidance advises that this consultation is carried out throughout the development process and followed on into the adoption phase. The process mirrors the Local Plan development process and will finally be incorporated into the two Local Plans.

The Guidance states that there is a close relationship between the Core Path Planning process and the community Plan Process as both processes require the Council to examine the requirements of the communities to develop and deliver an appropriate service. It is envisaged that this process will commence after the launch of the Strategy and links with the Community Planning Partnership will be investigated in the near future.

## **Path Network Creation**

The Access Officers undertook the regeneration of the 'New Town Trail' as a pilot project in the financial year 2002/03. This involved producing a new leaflet, improving signage and waymarking and the inclusion of the site on the Ayrshire Paths website. This site is popular with both local residents and tourists to the area and aims to raise the profile of local path networks.

In 2003/04 improvements were carried out throughout the Three Towns for walking and cycling including upgrading sections of route to all abilities standards, waymarking, installation of new promotional signage and the production of an informative map. This financial year has seen the development of the Stevenston Beach Local Nature Reserve Disabled Access project in partnership with Roads and Educational Services and Better Neighbourhoods Services.

All of the above projects have been developed under the guidance of the Forum and are based on ideas obtained from community consultation. Other projects that the Access Officers have been involved or assisted with include Landfill Tax Credit Scheme path projects in Largs, Dalry and on Great Cumbrae; the Ways to Walk Health Walks Project; Arran Path Skills Training and the Arran Access Trust.

## **Community Outdoor Access Grant Scheme**

Development and Promotion was successful in securing funding from SNH to develop the innovative Community Outdoor Access Grant Scheme (COAGS). This was launched on Tuesday 16th December 2003. The main purpose of the scheme is to assist the development of community

based access works. The aim of the scheme is to assist communities to undertake local projects and through this develop a sense of community ownership of local path networks.

The scheme offers assistance of a maximum of £500 towards the cost of any eligible work, such as:

- Improving / extending routes
- Inclusion of furniture for example seats and cycle stands
- Waymarking and signage
- Production / printing of promotional literature

The scheme was funded initially by SNH for a period of two years and a recent application has secured a further three years of funding. Applications for the 2005/06 round will be welcomed from April 2005.

### **Working in Partnership**

As access is not a stand-alone issue and contributes to a wide range of organisations' national, local and regional policies it is essential that a high level of partnership working takes place. The Forum itself provides a valuable mechanism to ensure partnership working however other activities include:

### **Outdoor Access Steering Group**

To ensure that Outdoor Access was viewed on a Council wide basis, a Steering Group was set up in 2002 with representation from a number of Council Departments. This includes Education, Roads, Development and Promotion, Finance, Country and Regional Parks, Legal and Grounds Maintenance as well as statutory agencies such as SNH and the Paths for All Partnership (PfAP). The group was instrumental in programming a three-year work plan for the newly established Access Officers, and continues to guide council access policy and development.

### **Scottish Natural Heritage**

The Access Officers posts are partly funded by SNH (until 31<sup>st</sup> July 2005). The Officers' workplans are agreed annually with SNH and the Officers report on a quarterly and annual basis to SNH. SNH are consulted regularly on project proposals and access development.

### **Ayrshire wide working – “Outdoor Access – the Ayrshire Way”**

In order to promote the benefits of outdoor access, East Ayrshire Council hosted the inaugural Ayrshire Wide Outdoor Access Conference on 25th February 2003 at the Grand Hall, Kilmarnock. To do this the three Ayrshire Authorities worked in partnership with SNH, PfAP, Ayrshire and Arran Health Board and Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire to organise this important free conference. The aim of this was to demonstrate the role that outdoor access can play in improving the quality of life for people in Ayrshire through the promotion of healthy lifestyles and tourism development.

In September 2004 an Ayrshire wide Access Training Event was organised to follow on from the Conference. This was again in partnership with the other Authorities, SNH and PfAP and hosted by North Ayrshire Council. It focussed on the development of the Outdoor Access Forum and the implementation of and the obligations posed by the Act. This again was a free event and was attended by a wide range of individuals and organisations.

The Authorities are organising an Ayrshire wide access event on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2005, in partnership with Sustrans, Ways to Walk, SNH and Cunninghame Ramblers, as part of the SNH Outdoor Access Week. It is envisaged that this event will be well attended and obtain significant media attention. The event includes a number of activities as follows, with a symbolic meeting of the access users from the three Authority areas at Eglinton Country Park:

- A cycle with East Ayrshire Ranger Service from Dean Castle Country Park to Eglinton Park
- A cycle with Sustrans from Troon Swimming Baths to Eglinton Park
- A cycle with North Ayrshire Ranger Service from Ardrossan to Eglinton Park starting
- A horse ride with the British Horse Society from either Knockentiber or Troon to Eglinton Country
- A brideways open day at Eglinton Country Park
- Lunch and a photo opportunity at the Racquet Hall at Eglinton Country Park

This event was developed to commemorate the Act coming into force and to demonstrate the three Authorities commitment to outdoor access and the implementation of the Act. All Ayrshire wide events are branded as “Outdoor Access – the Ayrshire Way” to make them instantly recognisable to the public. It is envisaged that South Ayrshire Council will host the next event.

### Links to the Community Plan

The Strategy identifies the Community Plan within the Policy Section of the Audit as one of the many local policies that outdoor access has a role to play in achieving said policy’s aims.

Outdoor Access through the development of new path networks can assist in ensuring that North Ayrshire is a prosperous, safe and environmentally friendly area. Through the Outdoor Access Forum and also through the forthcoming Core Path Planning Process, the Council is ensuring that outdoor access is developed and managed in partnership by the key public sector agencies with active participation of local people. Through the development and promotion of new and existing path networks it can also assist in developing healthy and caring communities.

### Further information

Further information can be found on-line at [www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/outdooraccess](http://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/outdooraccess) or by contacting the Access Officers via the details provided below:

Name	Address	Telephone	E-mail
Louise Kirk	Perceton House Irvine KA11 2DE	(01294) 225198	<a href="mailto:lkirk@north-ayrshire.gov.uk">lkirk@north-ayrshire.gov.uk</a>
Andrew Fyfe	Perceton House Irvine KA11 2DE	(01294) 225199	<a href="mailto:afyfe@north-ayrshire.gov.uk">afyfe@north-ayrshire.gov.uk</a>

**This Briefing Note was written by:**

Louise Kirk, Access Officer, North Ayrshire Council

Contact details: Development and Promotion, Perceton House, Irvine, KA11 2DE, tel 01294 225198, fax 01294 225136, email [lkirk@north-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:lkirk@north-ayrshire.gov.uk)