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**STIRLING AREA LOCAL ACCESS FORUM****ENVIRONMENT**

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**24 MAY 2007****NOT EXEMPT**

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**THE DRAFT STIRLING COUNCIL CORE PATHS PLAN – UPDATE**

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**1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update of the progress so far with regard to the Draft Stirling Council Core Paths Plan.

**2 SUMMARY**

- 2.1 195 copies of the Draft Stirling Council Core Paths Plan have now been distributed and the consultation process at this stage is coming to an end. The full Plan, including comments received, is also available on the Council website. The programme of Community Council area open meetings is now almost complete. 39 meetings have been conducted and there is only one remaining. To date 1336 people have attended these meetings.
- 2.2 355 people have responded to the Plan and made 614 comments. Of those that indicated a preference, 41% are happy with the Plan as it stands and 45% would like to see some type of alteration. 14% have stated that they do not agree with the Plan as it stands. Officers have found that the majority of people who do not agree with the Plan should have actually stated that they agreed but they felt some alterations were necessary.
- 2.3 2905 copies of the Paths and Countryside Access Survey 2006/07 Questionnaire have been distributed with a 41% response rate. The results so far from this Survey are providing Officers with information as to what a Core Path may actually be. According to the results, a Core Path will be signposted, easy to use, not necessarily surfaced, have information about it published, be mainly around settlements, mainly used for walking, mainly used for leisure purposes and be maintained.
- 2.4 It is still our intention to survey all the proposed Core Paths. We have now acquired three PDAs equipped with the Path Surveyor programme, which links in to our Countryside Access Management System. This equipment will allow us to survey all the proposed Core Paths in order to establish their condition and any work that may be required. From this we will be able to calculate an estimate of the cost of the work required. The surveying of routes will begin as soon as possible. Discussions on the strategic environmental assessment continue.

### 3 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 That Members note the progress so far.

### 4 CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 requires all Access Authorities to prepare a draft Core Path Plan by February 2008.
- 4.2 To produce the draft for the Stirling Council area the Countryside Service are following, approximately, the process set out in the Paths for All Partnership *Core Paths Plans a Guide to Good Practice*. As part of the process the Countryside Service have set a series of monthly progress meetings to ensure that all the actions necessary are undertaken within an appropriate timescale and that nothing is forgotten.

#### Consultation Strategy

- 4.3 Responses to the Paths and Countryside Access Questionnaire 2006/07 have continued to be received and results from the Stirling Sounding Board have now been supplemented by another 461 responses.

The table below shows the distribution and returns for the Questionnaire as of 14 May 2007. The numbers in brackets indicate the results on 16 November 2006.

<i>Method of distribution</i>	<i>No distributed</i>	<i>No. returned</i>
Stirling Sounding Board	1300 (1300)	719 (719) [55% return]
Countryside Service	1563 (1296)	419 (216)
Internet	43 (103)	43 (103)
Totals	2905	1180 (41% return)

- 4.4 The 1563 questionnaire total distributed by the Countryside Service includes approximately 341 that went out to libraries, offices and auction marts etc. and are yet to be collected and returned by anybody. When the figures in the above Table are adjusted to reflect these 'dormant' questionnaires the overall return rate is 46%.
- 4.5 To raise awareness and specifically of the open meetings, there have been 18 general awareness sessions attended by 343 people. One of these sessions was a radio interview on Central FM so this number will be significantly higher. There have also been 60 articles published in the press, including the Stirling Observer, community newsletters, national organisation membership newsletters and the Council's own publications.

#### Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 4.6 As reported previously, the Scottish Executive disagrees with the Council's assessment that no Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required. Discussions have been held with the Council's SEA Officer and the Council still believes that no SEA is required.
- 4.7 The Senior Access Officer has yet to meet with the Consultation Authorities, Historic Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage to discuss the reasoning for their decisions. However it is becoming clearly that this is not a problem solely restricted to Stirling Council or Core Paths Plans.

#### Second Round Consultation

- 4.8 195 copies of the Draft Stirling Council Core Paths Plan had been distributed by 14 May 2007. There are still plenty of copies left so if Members have other suggested location or organisations that should get one then please let the Countryside Service know.
- 4.9 The full Plan is also available to view on the Countryside Service website ([www.stirling.gov.uk/countryside](http://www.stirling.gov.uk/countryside)) where comments can also be submitted in electronic format. As of 14 May 2007 1267 people had visited the Draft Plan on the website and 929 have visited the maps.
- 4.10 At the time of writing there had been 39 meetings which were attended by 1336 people. The worst turnout was Cowie with five people and the best Carron Valley Bike Fest with 162.
- 4.11 Following the Cowie meeting the approach to consultation changed and meetings are now advertised by press release, posters in the relevant community and on all paths and letters to all proprietors that appear to own land. Roadside posters were also used, but these have recently been banned by the Council. Since the changes the turnout has increased and now meetings are averaging between 30 and 40 people.
- 4.12 There is only one meeting remaining, organised by the Countryside Service, for this year. The other nine meetings that had been planned were joint meetings with the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances all these meetings had to be cancelled. The National Park is now leading on the consultation for the boundary communities. We are told this will start in June and end in July.
- 4.13 All responses to the Plan must be in writing and include the personal details of the person making the comment. All comments that are received are uniquely numbered and added to a database. All respondents receive a card telling them when their response was received and what number it has been given.
- 4.14 By 14 May 2007 responses had been received from 355 people. Of these 126 people are happy with the Plan as currently proposed. 139 are happy with the Plan, but have a specific issue that they would like addressed. 42 people do not like the plan in its current form. Unfortunately, of those 42 the majority are only taking issue with one specific point in the Plan so perhaps should have actually recorded their view as happy with the Plan, but have a specific issue that they would like to see addressed.
- 4.15 In total the 355 people have made 614 specific comments on the Plan. These comments are available on the website in anonymous format and can be viewed by clicking on 'progress' on the Core Paths Plan pages.
- 4.16 To allow people an opportunity to see what everyone has said we have organised 3 meetings for October 23, 24 and 25 2007 at three different locations across the area. The exact format of the meetings has yet to be decided.

### **Route surveying**

- 4.17 All the proposed Core Paths will be surveyed during 2007 to ascertain their condition and the likely work involved in bringing them up to standard.
- 4.18 We now have 3 GPS equipped Personal Data Assistants that can link to our Countryside Access Management System. We are now surveying all the proposed routes to see whether there are missing signposts and to ensure that all boundaries are easily crossable. These are the minimum things that

the Paths and Countryside Access Survey 2006/07 and the Scottish Executive Guidance has identified.

- 4.19 Additionally we are also surveying the public's suggested additions where they seem practical from the information provided.

## **5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The process is in accord with the Council's policy on promoting local democracy and community leadership by providing an opportunity for local people to directly contribute to the development of the Core Paths Network.
- 5.2 It is also in accord with the Council's policy on promoting social inclusion by allowing anybody with an interest in Core Paths to express their opinions.
- 5.3 It supports the Council's sustainability aim by ensuring an appropriate network of paths is proposed that the public is known to want and will use. This will help to reduce reliance on the private car for some journeys.
- 5.4 It helps to deliver the aim of developing quality and best value by providing an opportunity for the public to ensure that the Council provides what they want, thus reducing wastage of time and resources.

## **6 CONSULTATIONS**

- 6.1 Consultations are ongoing.

## **7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The estimated cost of producing the Draft Stirling Council Core Paths Plan is £50,000 excluding staff time.
- 7.2 It is estimated that to sign and gate all the routes will cost £100,000 and take 12 months. This estimate will be reviewed as the path survey progresses.


## 8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003: Stirling Council Core Paths Plan, Stirling Area Access Forum 26 April 2006 and Environment Committee 11 May 2006.
- 8.2 The Draft Stirling Council Core Paths Plan – Update, Stirling Area Access Forum 30 August 2006.
- 8.3 The Draft Stirling Council Core Paths Plan – Update, Stirling Area Access Forum 16 November 2006.

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