

# **The Community Paths Project 1998 – 2006 Review**

## **Summary**

Since 1998 Stirling Council Countryside Service has been running the Community Paths Project, which worked with individual communities to develop their own networks of paths. The project finally concluded in March 2006 with the consultation of the newly established Carron Valley Community Council.

This report highlights how the project was undertaken and how the results generated will fit into the Core Paths Plan that Stirling Council will produce under the requirements of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

## **The Area Covered.**

When the project started it covered the whole 956 square miles (2,476 square km) of the Stirling Council area. Over 75% of this is classed as rural with a mix of mountains, lochs, farmland and woodland. Two thirds of the population are clustered around Stirling in the Southeast corner of the Council area.

In 2002 the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, the first national park in Scotland, came into being and the area covered by the Council's Countryside Service shrank to 413 square miles (1,070 square km). Prior to the establishment of the National Park the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Interim Committee was set up to pave the way. During their two-year operation the Council worked jointly with them on access matters within their area.

## **Existing Path Networks**

During the 1980s Stirling District Council established a Footpath Register, which was recorded on a computer-based system by Stirling Council. This recorded some 441 miles (711km) of paths. In 2000 the Countryside Service commissioned a literature study to establish what routes were being promoted in guidebooks, maps and leaflets.

This revealed references to a total of 1,109 miles (1,785km) of path. Rarely did a recorded route match a literature study route. Most of the routes originally recorded by the Council tended to cluster round communities and primarily around lowland areas. By contrast the literature study results tended to emphasise highland routes and in particular those on Munros and Corbetts.

## **The Stirling Area Local Access Forum and the Countryside Access and Recreation Strategy**

The Countryside Access and Recreation Strategy (CARS) was produced by the Stirling Area Access Forum (SAAF) and was adopted by Stirling Council's Environmental Quality Committee on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1999. The SAAF used the draft strategy that had been produced by Perth and Kinross Council then modified it to meet the needs of the Stirling Council area. It included policies that sought to guide the development, management and promotion of countryside access within the Stirling Council area.

The SAAF was one of the earliest ones in Scotland and proved to be very successful. It brought together different organisations with an interest in countryside access and recreation.

The SAAF members were: the British Horse Society, Ramblers' Association Scotland, Scottish Rights of Way Society, Stirling Access Group, Paths for All Partnership, Forest Enterprise, Forestry Commission, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Association of Deer Management Groups, Forth Valley Enterprise, Forth Valley Health Board, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Landowners' Federation, National Farmers Union Scotland, East of Scotland Water and Stirling Council.

The resultant strategy contains a vision, key principles and 29 detailed policies split into three sections – development, management and promotion. Supporting information on the legislative, national and regional policies that shaped or guided the development of the strategy was also included.

It had been anticipated that a yearly Action Plan would show what was being done under each policy heading. Unfortunately, this proved unsuccessful and fell by the wayside after only two years.

### **Countryside Access and Recreation Strategy**

The Vision:

**To improve access and recreation opportunities for all to the countryside of Stirling district, whilst promoting responsible use, supporting rural economies and respecting current land management.**

Key principles.

*To work in partnership with organisations, communities and landowners.*

*To ensure adequate and appropriate information on access opportunities.*

*To promote responsible use of the countryside and address the need for community education in rural matters.*

*To promote access for all.*

*To adopt a sustainable approach to project development and management.*

*To promote community health benefits.*

*To adopt and maintain a quality approach to development and management.*

*To recognise and promote the economic potential of projects.*

A review of the Strategy in 2004 showed that the vision and key principles that were set out in 1999 are as relevant today as they were then.

### **Developing the Community Paths Plan**

Policies four and five of the CARS introduced the Community Path Project. The rationale for this was that the majority of people want the opportunity to undertake journeys from home. The Paths for All Partnership (established in 1996 to provide advice and support to people to help them to deal with the growing demand for more paths near to where people live and work) had been instrumental in developing an approach whereby local communities are given the opportunity to be fully involved in identifying and tackling their needs. The Paths for All Partnership also identified a number of benefits of such an approach including: health benefits from encouraging physical activity; providing more variety than linear routes alone; supporting economic growth through attracting visitors; and contributing to a reduction in pollution through the increased use of local paths instead of vehicles for short journeys.

## **Countryside Access and Recreation Strategy**

### **Policy 4 - Community Paths Scheme.**

To develop a Community Paths Project which works in partnership with all sectors of local communities to create, improve and maintain path networks around settlements in the Stirling Council area.

### **Policy 5 - Stirling Urban Area.**

To develop a project to improve countryside access and recreation opportunities within the urban area of the district. This should aim to connect existing urban green spaces and the different communities in the more heavily populated part of the Council area.

During October 2000 the Access Officer asked the Countryside Service and the Stirling Area Access Forum for help in drawing up a plan for developing and managing access to the countryside with the resources that were available.

### ***The Consultation***

The "Path Management Discussion" document dealt with the issues of prioritising the development of access. People were asked to suggest how we should divide the area into manageable pieces and what criteria we should use to decide the order that we tackle them in.

### ***The Results***

All the Countryside Service and many of the Stirling Area Access Forum responded and their views were combined. In terms of development, the following responses were made. Those at the top of the list received the greatest support.

- The unit size for a project area should be the community council areas.
- We should stop all work within the Interim National Park area and concentrate our resources on the remaining area.
- We should use a point system to score the different aspects and then tackle the areas with the most points first. The results should be built into a three to five year plan which allows for one or two areas per year to be tackled, depending on size. We should also recognise a strategic and local path network.
- Communities that have expressed a desire for a path network – if asked get more points.
- Amount of cash available for a network development – more available sources more points.
- Existing provision – how many km of path there are in an area (least gets high score).
- Car ownership – lowest most points.
- Health – worst gets most points.
- Complaints – area with highest number of complaints gets high score.
- Size of community – bigger satisfies more people, so more points.
- Unemployment – higher gets more points.
- Other community initiatives that can dovetail with the path network development – more potential, more points.
- Where we want to work.
- Sketch it ourselves.
- Identify route requirements and tackle.
- Safety.
- Key routes - do sooner not later.

- First come, first served.
- Quick wins first.
- Spread attention so bits done all over.

### **Acting on the Results**

On the basis of the results a way forward was proposed. In terms of development it was decided that the unit size should be Community Council areas. It was also agreed that we would concentrate our work outwith the National Park area, although we would work in partnership with the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Interim Committee (LLTIC) providing advice and support as necessary the development of path networks.

In terms of actually prioritising access the criteria in the following table were chosen. The prioritisation process was carried out for all community councils in the Council area, but those within the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs Interim Area were graded independently. For each of the criteria the maximum score was 32 outside the LLTIC area and 9 within. The numbers relate to the total number of community councils in the area.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Highest points awarded</b>
Community desire for network	if asked
Number of cash sources available	most sources
Existing provision.	lowest recorded
Car ownership	lowest
Public Transport Dependency	highest
Health.	worst
Mortality rates	highest
Complaints	highest
Size of community	biggest
Unemployment	higher
Deprivation ranking	highest
Population	highest
Income Support	highest
Other community initiatives that can dovetail with the path network development	more

The results of the process gave each community council a ranking between 1 and 32 (1 and 9 within LLTIC area). This is shown in the table below along with an indication of when the initial consultation took place.

Community councils outwith Loch Lomond & Trossachs Interim area	Ranking	Initial Consultation date
Arnprior	20	June 2004
Buchlyvie	24	June 2004
Bannockburn	8	Sept 2001
Broomridge	18	Sept 2001
Borestone	11	Sept 2001
Torbrex	15	Sept 2001
Cambusbarron	10	Sept 2001
Kings Park	13	Sept 2001

Community councils in the Loch Lomond & Trossachs Interim area	Ranking	Initial Consultation date
Balquhidder	8	LLTNPA
Trossachs	4	LLTNPA
Callander	1	Nov 1999
Strathard	2	LLTNPA
Port of Menteith	6	LLTNPA
Gartmore	5	LLTNPA
Buchanan	8	LLTNPA
Drymen	3	Feb 2002

Cowie	6	June 1999
Plean	12	June 1999
Polmaise	5	June 1999
Craigs	7	Sept 2001
Mercat Cross	14	Sept 2001
Fintry	29	March 2006
Gargunnoch	21	June 1998
Kippen	19	Feb 2003
Raploch	1	Sept 2001
Riverside	2	Sept 2001
Balfron	25	May 1999
Killlearn	28	May 2002
Killin	32	May 2003
Port of Menteith	26	LLTNPA
Strathblane	27	March 2003
Bridge of Allan	23	Sept 2001
Causewayhead	4	Sept 2001
Cornton	3	Sept 2001
Cambuskenneth	9	Sept 2001
Logie	16	Sept 2001
Dunblane	17	Dec 2001
Kilmadock	32	June 2001
Thornhill & Blairdrummond	22	Dec 2002
Croftamie	30	LLTNPA

Strathfillan	7	LLTNPA
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LLTNPA indicates areas that were taken over by the National Park before the Council undertook the Community Paths Project in those areas.

## The Community Paths Project Methodology

The majority of the consultation work was carried out by the Countryside Service rather than employing consultants. Callander was the only rural community where consultants (Land Use Consultants) were used and part of the contract's aim was to produce a tested methodology for use elsewhere. This formed the basis for our work elsewhere in the Stirling Council area.

Due to the size of the Urban Stirling area (Bridge of Allan, Stirling, Bannockburn, Cambusbarron, Cambuskenneth and Blairlogie) consultants (Halcrow Fox) were used. However the methodology used was still based on that prepared for Callander.

The aim at the community consultations was threefold. Firstly to find out where people currently went, where they would like to go and finally what issues existed.

Wherever possible we tried to work with a local group e.g. the community council, local paths group, traders' association.

Meetings were carried out during the day and also on the evening to allow the best opportunity for people with different commitments to attend. All meetings were notified to Community Councils and all known landowners by letter, and more generally by local posters and press releases.

Blank maps were provided for people to draw on the routes with different coloured pens they currently walk, horse ride or cycle and the new routes that they would like to see created. People then either recorded the problems that existed on questionnaires, flip chart paper or directly on to the maps.

All the route information collected was digitised and added to a geographic information system. All the other information was processed and except for some of the early meetings, was held in a database. The work-undertaken by the consultants was presented as printed reports.

All the collected information was used to prepare an action plan for the community. This was then taken back to either the community council or to an open public meeting to see if our interpretation of the information was correct.

Work would then start to implement the action plan. This would include discussing proposals with affected landmanagers, working with community groups to secure funding, arranging for and carrying out path improvement works and finally producing a community paths leaflet.

### Project Realities

Over all, the project has been successful. However, the lack of dedicated resources and poor project management has meant it has not been as successful as it could have been.

Despite producing a ranked list of community councils for the entire council area this wasn't always followed. The result was some of the areas that were ranked lower such as Balfron were tackled before others that were ranked higher such as Bannockburn.

There are two reasons for this. First it tends to reflect a certain amount of opportunism and the Countryside Service's desire to take advantage of any situation that may move the project along. The second is that the project plan did not take account the area based nature of the Countryside Ranger Service. The Council area is split into three areas with a Ranger covering each. There was a desire within the team to see the project progressing in each Ranger area, which was not reflected on the project plan. The result was that the first six areas tackled covered each of the Ranger areas and showed areas ranked in the 30s being progressed at the same time as those in ranked less than 10. Despite this all the areas ranked higher than 10 on the initial list had been started by the end of 2001.

Countryside Ranger Area v Ranking for the first 6 consultations.			
Name	Ranking	Initial Consultation date	Ranger Area
Gargunnoch	21	June 1998	East
Balfron	25	May 1999	West
Cowie	6	June 1999	East
Plean	12	June 1999	East
Polmaise	5	June 1999	East
Kilmadock	33	June 2001	North

The exact way that each consultation was approached varied as we learnt from our mistakes and gained experience. The first meeting in Gargunnoch was arranged as a structured meeting lasting about one and a half hours. Other meetings were designed as drop in sessions with staff being on hand for a number of hours and people coming and going as they desired.

Attendance at the meetings that were organised was very variable (worst Polmaise 2 people and the best Stirling Thistle centre 100+). As the project progressed we took the opportunity of trying to piggyback on other events to catch a wider audience e.g. Dunblane Market and the Community Futures Projects. This improved the numbers of people that we met, but did not necessarily add to the information that we received.

The collection of route based information has been consistent from day one. The only problem was with the digital format with which the consultants presented their consultation results.

The collection of other information, such as problems and aspirations, has changed from flip charts to questionnaires and back to flip charts again. The questionnaires were initially used by

the consultants and produced good results. However when they were generally adopted by the Countryside Service for all consultations they initially did not work. Refining them to a single A4 sheet that could be collected and completed on the day improved this. All the questionnaire information was added to a Microsoft Access database to allow some level of analysis. Where questionnaires were not used, the information collected was written up as a word document. However, this did not consistently happen.

The action plans were relatively easy to produce as the majority of people identified the same routes and the same problems. Very few completely new routes were identified.

Without a dedicated budget for carrying out the identified work progress was slow and always had to be in association with a community group. This allowed us to tap into funding that would have otherwise not been available to the Council.

Funders for project work have included the private sector: Scottish Hydro Electric, Prudential, Paul Trust, Killearn Trust, LCH Generators and Bridge of Allan Merchants Association. From the Public Sector: Europe (ERDF, ESEP), Millennium Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage, Stirling Landfill Tax Trust, Aggregate Tax, Forestry Commission, Paths for All Partnership, Scottish Executive, Scottish Enterprise Forth Valley, NHS Scotland Forth Valley Health Promotion, Stirling Partnership for Urban Regeneration and Stirling Council. From the voluntary sector: Ramblers' Association, Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society and Sustrans.

One distinct problem with the poor project management was that rather than completing one area then moving on we would try to operate on a number of projects concurrently. Unfortunately, we did not have the resources to operate this type of approach efficiently. The results being that some areas have only had initial consultations, others have action plans, some have had practical work completed and others have had final leaflets produced.

The establishment of the National Park did affect the project by reducing the numbers of area that we had to cover.

When the project started, there were 41 Community Council areas to tackle. The establishment of the National Park reduced the ones within the Countryside Service's operational area to 30 with another 7 being partly within the Park area. This takes into account the creation of the new Carron Valley Community Council and that there is only a very small part of Balquhider Community Council within our area thus it is being dealt with wholly by the National Park. In these cases all the settlements are contained within the National Park area. The National Park went on to establish its own Community Futures Project and consulted these communities on access as part of that. As part of this process they also consulted those communities that border the National Park such as Killearn.

## **The Results**

By the end of March 2006, all the community council areas within the Countryside Service area of influence had had at least the minimum consultation to find out where they go, where they would like to go and what issues exist.

Issues that were identified during the consultation phase fell into two categories. Those that were specific to the actual routes highlighted such as broken gates/stiles, missing bridges, poor drainage and bad overgrowth.

The second category was more generic and could apply to paths anywhere. These included signposting paths, better path information, using easily accessible gates, improving path surfaces but not urbanising them, traffic free routes, better routes for less mobile users, linking communities, improved maintenance, improve muddy paths and litter collection.

Eight community path leaflets have been produced and two others are in preparation. Some communities have had action plans produced and path improvement work carried out. Although all the work is recorded on the Countryside Service database – Countryside Access Management System – it is not possible to extract the exact details of the work that has been undertaken as a direct result of the projects.

Improvement works have included installing signposts around Plean, Cowie, Fallin, Dunblane, Bridge of Allan, Bannockburn, Cambusbarron, Cambuskenneth, Stirling, Gargunnoch, Doune and Deanston. Path construction/improvement work has occurred in all the communities highlighted above and Balfron, Strathblane, Thornhill, Blairdrummond, Raploch and Callander.

Originally the Council recorded 441 miles (711km) of paths. This project showed that there are many more paths out there that people use. Many may be public rights of way and together they identify a network that people use of 2,769 miles (4,456km) of path.

### **Community Paths and Core Paths**

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 requires the council to develop a core paths plan, but the interpretation of what a core path is is vast. In essence any route on land or inland water can be a core path.

The Paths for All Partnership has produced a good practice guide on the production of core paths plans. In it a staged approach is recommended. Initially it is suggested that a round of informal consultations should be held to raise awareness of core paths and to find out what the communities actually have and want.

The Community Paths Project has been running for the past eight years and provides a valuable resource telling us what issues are important to the communities within the Stirling Council area.

We will use all the information that has been collected so far as the starting point from which to select our interpretation of the Stirling Council Core Path Network. Once we have our proposed network we will revisit the communities to see whether we have got it right.

*Richard Barron, Senior Access Officer, 28 April 2006*