

## **CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM**

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**Title** Core Paths Plan Review – Informal consultation

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**Purpose** The purpose of this paper is to highlight the key issues from the recent informal consultation with communities on the core paths network.

**Advice Sought**

- a. Advice is sought from the Forum as to whether we should include more roads and pavements within communities in the Core Paths Plan.
- b. Advice is sought from the Forum as to whether Jocks Road and the Minigaig Pass should be included.
- c. Advice is sought from the Forum on whether routes that don't exist should be considered if it is unlikely that they will be delivered in two years.
- d. Advice is sought from the Forum on the inclusion of the Thieves Road in the revised Core Paths Plan.

**Background**

1. At the last LOAF meeting it was highlighted that the planning representatives from all the Community Councils received settlement maps and wider area maps, with existing core paths. The following questions were posed to that group as well as SNH, SEPA and Historic Scotland:

*Does the core path network still meet your requirements and make sense? Are there gaps in the network you would seek to address? If so please mark these on the map.*

2. A number of Estates also took the opportunity to comment as part of the wider review into the settlement allocations for the draft Local Plan.
3. A total of 77 responses were received of which 19 related to core paths. Most of the communities were commented on in some way, shape or form. Comments were wide ranging but can be loosely categorized into either management issues or proposed changes.
4. The proposed changes have been assessed against the revised objectives which were supported by the Forum. A number of these, plus the network identified for Highland

Perthshire, will go forward for the formal consultation in the spring of 2013. There are a number of proposals that are on the cusp of fitting in with the overall objectives of the Core Paths Plan and advice is being sought on these from the Forum.

### **Advice on proposed changes**

5. A number of communities have identified a range of existing roads within the settlement that link the wider core path network for example see annex I. Whilst these routes will deliver a wide range of activities and abilities as they are already existing roads and pavements, it is difficult to see how they deliver other objectives such as conserving natural heritage or help those working the land to accommodate access.

### **Advice is sought from the Forum as to whether we should include more roads and pavements within communities in the Core Paths Plan.**

6. Two high level mountain routes have also been identified by respondents, the Minigaig Pass and Jocks Road. It was agreed at the May meeting of the Forum that only robust connecting routes through the mountains should be considered. This is consistent with the existing Core Paths Plan that has the connecting routes through the lower straths e.g Gaick Pass, The Angus Glens are also connected from Deeside through the Bachngairn path and between Glen Tanar and Glen Mark through the Mount Keen route. It is interesting to note that the Reporter to the Inquiry into the Perth and Kinross Plan considered a number of high level routes now within the boundary and stated that there are compelling reasons not to add these routes on safety grounds etc and that their use should be left to “responsible users”.

### **Advice is sought from the Forum as to whether Jocks Road and the Minigaig Pass should be included.**

7. A number of respondents identified routes that were considered during the development of the Core Paths Plan but were excluded due to the fact they would take two or more years to be delivered. Whilst there is nothing in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 that states routes have to be delivered within two years, (this comes from the Scottish Government guidance), it does require that when considering routes we should have regard to the likelihood of people using the route, the desirability of encouraging people to use the route and the need to balance the needs of users with land owners.
8. A route that typifies this dilemma is the proposal for a cycle path between Grantown and Dulnain. Delivery of this route requires the extension of the Strathspey Railway and the construction of a tunnel under the A95. These works would allow for the realignment of the A95 and the construction of a cycle path. This project is unlikely to begin until 2016 taking it beyond the two year deliverability target. The provision of

another core path to be used as a temporary alternative may not be in the interest of the land owner, or likely users.

**Advice is sought from the Forum on whether routes that don't exist should be considered if it is unlikely that they will be delivered in two years.**

9. There are of course a number of paths in the current plan that have yet to be developed. One such route is the link between the Highburnside housing scheme and the Craigellachie NNR (LBS124). The Estate is renewing its objection to the path as in their view it doesn't meet the Plan objectives, isn't needed and doesn't fit with the communities' aspirations. We are currently clarifying the Community views on this path and will be discussing this with the Community Council in the near future.
10. In addition to the proposals from the informal consultation there is the existing list of candidate core paths from the last round of public consultation. It is proposed that these, subject to resolving issues highlighted above, are assessed against the revised criteria.
11. The Thieves Road between Loch an Eilein and Feshie Bridge is an example of a candidate core path from the above list. At the time this route was not taken forward due to concerns about Capercaillie disturbance. Whilst this still may be the case it cannot be ignored how popular this route is especially for mountain biking. Core path designation is one of the primary tools to ensure paths are managed and protected so designating the Thieves Road would give a locus to its management.

**Advice is sought from the Forum on the inclusion of the Thieves Road in the revised Core Paths Plan.**

### **Management issues**

12. A number of respondents highlighted maintenance issues stating that routes should not be designated if maintenance programmes are not in place. These issues were raised when the first plan was being developed. Then and now the position remains that the core path network is maintained by a variety of bodies from land owners through to community groups and the Park Authority role is to oversee this. The lack of formal maintenance should not exclude a path from designation but it would strengthen the case for better upkeep.
13. Further views on matters relating to core paths are welcome.

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