



Core Paths Plan Review – Paper for Approval

Agenda Item 6

National Park Authority Board Meeting

14th June 2021

Paper for decision

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to present the Board with a proposed amended Core Paths Plan. This follows a comprehensive internal review process and Scottish Government Local Inquiry which has resulted in a Letter of Direction. The paper provides updates on progress since the Paper for Noting presented October 2019. It also provides a short synopsis of the statutory role of the National Park Authority in relation to core paths for new Board members.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. The Board is asked to formally adopt the proposed amended Core Paths Plan as presented in Appendix 7.

3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan and/or Our 5-year Plan

- 3.1. Within the Partnership Plan we commit to “ensuring that the National Park Core Paths are reviewed and fit for purpose” under Visitor Experience Outcome 5, (Recreation Opportunities).
- 3.2. Specifically Priority 5.1 states that one measure towards improving and extending the National Park’s recreational path network is by ensuring that the National Park Core Paths are reviewed and fit for purpose.

4. Background

- 4.1 The National Park Authority is the statutory Access Authority for the area and as such has four core duties under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. These are to:
 - (i) facilitate a Local Access Forum,
 - (ii) uphold public access rights as provided under the legislation,
 - (iii) promote responsible behaviour in line with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and,
 - (iv) create and review a Core Paths Plan for the area.
- 4.2 Core Paths are defined as the most important paths (of any width or surface) within the network which provide the public with reasonable access throughout the National Park.
- 4.3 They can be paths that communities require to carry out daily journeys from home to school or work, or paths which allow both residents and visitors to fully explore the National Park, such as the West Highland Way. Other paths exist and complete the path network however the Core Path network should form that core system of paths that provide a reasonable level of provision.
- 4.4 A path having core path status brings no additional duties upon the National Park Authority however it does provide additional powers to do anything considered appropriate to maintain the path, keep it free from obstruction or encroachment, and provide the public with directions through signage and promotion.
- 4.5 The National Park Authority adopted its first Core Paths Plan in June 2010 fulfilling its duty, under section 17 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.
- 4.6 The existing Core Paths Plan was prepared using specially designed and agreed selection criteria, and involved an extensive period of public consultation, community and partner engagement, mapping and assessment of paths. This process concluded with a Scottish Government Reporter's Unit hearing on the unwithdrawn objections which provides a recommendation to the Minister on whether to adopt or not.
- 4.7 The current network of core paths consists of 732km of cycle tracks, hill paths, historic routes, footways (pavements), forest tracks, short sections of quiet minor roads and off-road paths in towns, villages and wider countryside of the National Park. See Appendix 1, Overview 2010.

5. Informal and Formal Review Process

- 5.1. A thorough review process was carried out between 2017 and 2019. Proposed changes to the Core Paths network in advance of a formal consultation process were presented in a paper to the Board in September 2018. The National Park Board agreed at this meeting to proceed with a formal public consultation of proposed amendments to the Core Paths Plan. These proposals included 81km of additional core path (11% of the network) and the removal of 4km of core path (< 1% of the network).

- 5.2. Results of the formal consultation process were presented to the National Park Board in October 2019 within the Core Paths Review Paper (Appendix 3).
- 5.3. The 2019 Paper outlined the objections received through the formal statutory process and how the Access and Recreation Team had investigated and resolved a number of those objections. It concluded that 14 objections relating to 5 proposed amendments had not been withdrawn at the time of writing that paper and would proceed through the statutory process to Local Inquiry and await Ministerial direction or whether to revise or adopt.
- 5.4. The statutory process outlined within a flowchart in Appendix 6 confirms that the next step at that point was to present the proposed plan with outstanding objections to Scottish Government for a local inquiry and await Ministerial direction on whether to revise or adopt.

6. Local Inquiry

- 6.1. On the 12th of December 2019 The Access and Recreation Team submitted the proposed amended core paths plan with outstanding objections to Scottish Government.
- 6.2. Understandably the Local Inquiry process was negatively impacted by the Covid19 Epidemic.
- 6.3. On the 23rd of March 2021 the National Park Authority received the Inquiry Report (Appendix 4) and a Letter of Direction (Appendix 5) from Scottish Government.
- 6.4. The Report agrees with the National Park Authority position relating to all outstanding objections and directs the National Park Authority to adopt the proposed amended core paths plan with no alternations.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. Officers are confident that the Core Paths Plan review and consultation process has resulted in a refreshed and robust core path network within the National Park.
- 7.2. Considerable efforts have been made to ensure a transparent process throughout with both informal and formal consultations reaching wide audiences and gathering a good level of engagement.
- 7.3. The Recreation, Access and Health Team investigations into all objections and clear reasoning led to a significant proportion of objections being removed, small improvements to the network agreed, and a positive Local Inquiry Report from Scottish Government.

8. Appendices

- Appendix 1 Current 2010 CPP presented at Oct 2019 Meeting
- Appendix 2 Selection Criteria
- Appendix 3 Core Paths Review Paper October 2019
- Appendix 4 Local Inquiry Report
- Appendix 5 Scottish Government Letter of Direction
- Appendix 6 Flowchart depicting the process for Core Path reviews
- Appendix 7 Proposed Amended CPP Overview Map presented at Oct 2019 Meeting

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