



**REPORT TO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 20 JUNE 2023**

SUBJECT: CORE PATHS ACTION PLAN 2023 - 2026

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND
FINANCE)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the formulation of the Core Paths Action Plan 2023 – 2026, in partnership with the Moray Local Outdoor Access Forum (MLOAF), which includes the use of the funding to employ a Core Paths Ranger for a period of 27 months commencing October 2023.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (F) (7) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to exercising the statutory functions of the Council under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended the Committee agree:

- i) the proposals and outputs as contained in the attached Moray Core Paths Action Plan 2023-2026 and associated Appendices; and**
- ii) the employment of a Core Paths Ranger to implement the Plan for a period of 27 months commencing October 2023.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2016 an Access Management Strategy was prepared for the Dorenell Wind Farm as a result of a condition applied to the planning consent. The Strategy was produced by developer EDF Energy in consultation with the Moray Council Access Manager and The Moray Local Outdoor Access Forum. A major output of this Strategy is a commitment by EDF Energy to an annual contribution to the Moray Council of £50k per annum (£1.25m for the 25 year life span of the wind farm). This is to be used by the Council solely for the development and management of the [Core Paths Network](#) across the whole of Moray identified in the Moray Core Paths Plan. This equates to a sizeable sum of money and it is important to carefully consider how this resource

should be used in a planned way rather than just being reactive to immediate demands and desires arising at any given time.

- 3.2 This Committee on 21 January 2020 agreed a *Strategic Framework Document* as the blueprint for the range of outputs and activities on which the £50k annual Dorenell Windfarm financial contribution for Moray's Core Paths can be spent over the next 25 years until 2044 (para 8 of the minute refers). Committee also agreed to the preparation of a 3 year rolling prioritised Action Plan to be submitted to a future meeting for approval. The attached Core Paths Action Plan 2023-2026 and the associated three Appendices is set out at **Appendix 1** to this report, and has been prepared as the first document in response to that instruction. The total available budget over the period is £188k.

4. Core Paths Action Plan

- 4.1 This Action Plan covers how the Dorenell Contribution should be spent over the next 3 financial years 2023-2026. The results of an audit of all of the Core Paths recently carried out have advised on the condition of features on each of the paths informing what specific issues and defects need to be addressed.
- 4.2 The Plan has been prepared in conjunction with the Moray Local Outdoor Access Forum (MLOAF) which is a statutory body set up under the access legislation to provide a view on a wide range of matters relating to outdoor access and to advise the Council on its statutory access duties including Core Paths. Specifically for this Action Plan the Forum have worked in partnership with the Council, particularly in relation to the process for selecting the priority Core Paths to be taken forward for treatment.
- 4.3 The key objective is to make every prioritised Core Path as accessible as possible. The most effective way to achieve this in a way that spreads resources is to implement small scale works across the network rather than limit operations to expensive projects in a few locations. Most of these works do not require owner consent and this limits future liability for the Council in maintenance as set out in the rolling plan. This also maximises benefits across the whole of Moray. This approach was agreed as part of the Strategic Framework document already agreed by this Committee on 21 January 2020 (para 8 of the minute refers). Work will focus on addressing deteriorating paths due to current poor/non-existent maintenance and improvements needed to remove barriers to accessibility. Work will primarily be 'light touch' rather than large scale engineering to minimise any negative impacts on the environment.
- 4.4 The Core Paths Action Plan also dovetails with the The Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan, Moray Routes: Bright Futures which was agreed at the ED&IS Committee on 7 February 2023 (para 16 of the minute refers). The Plan, funded through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF), identifies projects to enhance the six long distance walking/ active travel routes in rural Moray i.e. Moray Way, Speyside Way, Dava Way, Moray Coast Trail, Rothes Way and Isla Way. This would be targeted towards delivery of significant long term benefits to the visitor experience, positively impacting the visitor economy and the local landscape, whilst also indirectly

supporting the Moray Council Active Travel Strategy. These projects if developed in the next few years would resolve many of the issues already recorded along these Core Paths in the audit for the Core Paths Action Plan. The key factor here is to hold on any improvements on these Core Paths until a clearer picture emerges of funding and development timescales for the implementation of the identified RTIF projects.

- 4.5 All of Moray's Core Paths have been scored against a range of selection criteria, already agreed at the above mentioned Committee on 21 January 2020, where the higher the aggregate score the greater priority is given to the path. The Core Path scorings are shown for each path in Appendix 2 of the attached Action Plan. All scorings were carried out in conjunction with the MLOAF.
- 4.6 Works will only be carried out on paths prioritised through the selection process outlined above and detailed in Section 5 of the attached Action Plan. Appendix 3 of the Plan lists the paths ranked by aggregate scorings; all the 78 Core Paths highlighted in red are the selected prioritised paths which are candidates to be improved, 159 amber paths being optional and 121 green paths definitely not prioritised. The scoring cut off points between the 3 categories have been agreed with MLOAF.
- 4.7 The most effective and efficient way to implement the required Core Path improvements is to establish a new fixed-term post to physically carry out improvements and to co-ordinate overall effort. This is because the disparate and fragmented nature of the works at multiple locations spread across the whole of the paths network means that external contractors would likely be less interested in securing the work and in any case existing Council staff would still have to co-ordinate overall effort. Additionally currently there is considerable market volatility and difficulty in securing contractors for this type of work. It is proposed to create the fixed term post of Core Paths Ranger working as part of the Moray Council Open Space Team.
- 4.8 The Core Paths Ranger will initially plan what needs to be done (development and maintenance schedules) for each path and will carry out the necessary works procuring materials as required.
- 4.9 It is intended to initially employ the Core Paths Ranger from October 2023 to December 2025 which is a period of 27 months. Any extension beyond this period will be subject to available finances and opportunities that may arise. The grading for the post is Grade 5 as determined by the HR Evaluation Panel.
- 4.10 A review will be carried out in 2005 which will assess the progress and successes of the Core Paths Action Plan, what lessons can be learned and what the following 3 year term of the Action Plan should look like. Consideration at that stage will be given to a further Core Paths audit to give a steer on requirements for future improvements and whether to continue employment of the Ranger as the best way forward to facilitate Plan implementation.

5. Collaborative Approach

- 5.1 It is accepted that the Ranger would only achieve a limited amount of path improvements working on their own. It is important therefore to increase the capacity of the Ranger to achieve more by working collaboratively where possible with others. The emphasis will be on encouraging social inclusion and community participation.
- 5.2 The Ranger will work along the existing Moray Countryside Officer for larger tasks. Where there is scope for joint working the Ranger will work with local community and access groups to implement improvements; making best use of scarce resources and facilitating added value to overall effort. The Ranger will also liaise with the Criminal Justice Team to carry out suitable tasks. Contractors may sometimes be procured for specialist tasks such as tree work.
- 5.3 The Ranger will work pro-actively with the Community Support Unit in setting up a Core Paths volunteer scheme to help with the various improvement tasks. Promotion of the scheme will be channelled through Community Councils and MLOAF. Training and equipment will be provided by the Council to support the volunteers.
- 5.4 The Access Manager and Core Paths Ranger will also work collaboratively with partners in relation to paths connecting to the Highland core paths network.

6. Outputs

- 6.1 The main outputs for the 3 year plan are summarised in the table below primarily relating to the Core Paths Ranger who will be the committed resource to improve/maintain the prioritised paths, manage the volunteer scheme and deliver the signage scheme.

The available funding to 31 March 2026 is £188k - £50k per annum for the years 23/24, 24/25 and 25/26 plus £38k existing funding from previous years allocation.

Costs	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	TOTAL
Core Paths Officer salary	13,571	27,957	21,597	63,125
Officer on costs	3,936	8,107	6,263	18,306
Vehicle hire	1,992	4,383	3,616	9,991
Fuel	780	1716	1416	3912
Computer/Tablet	500	0	0	500
Mobile Phone	255	55	55	365
PPE	300	0	0	300
Signage Scheme	5,000	5,000	5,000	15,000
Materials/Equipment/contractor procurement	15,715	31,885	23,899	72,501
Volunteer Scheme	0	2000	2000	4000
TOTALS	42,049	82,105	63,846	188,000

7. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

Ensuring people can enjoy their access rights, unimpeded and free from obstruction, accommodating active leisure opportunities contributing to achieving the aim of healthier citizens.

(b) Policy and Legal

The Council have a duty to prepare a Core Paths Plan but not to manage, develop or promote the routes. The Moray Core Paths Plan was however agreed as Council Policy inclusive of a commitment contained within policies in the document to make the overall network as accessible as possible through planned improvements, management and promotion. The Core Paths Action Plan details how the policies contained in the Core Paths Plan are to be implemented and the Dorenell financial contribution provides the necessary resources for the next 3 years.

(c) Financial implications

The annual £50k windfall sum for Core Paths places no additional financial burden on the Council as this has been secured from an external source. Risks are low with the fund constituting an additional source of revenue allowing the Council to carry out works on Core Paths that would not be otherwise funded from within existing Council budgets. This funding stream cannot be used for other activity, it is ring-fenced to the Core Path network. There is no legal obligation placed on EDF Energy to provide this funding although this is likely to continue as it is part of a community contribution which is standard industry practice for windfarms. The proposals in this report will be met from the annual contribution plus an underspend of £38,000 carried forward from 2022/23.

(d) Risk Implications

In the event the Core Paths Action Plan is not implemented then there will be further deterioration in the condition and accessibility of Moray's Core Paths Network with resultant loss of opportunities in terms of improved health, carbon emissions reduction, social inclusion and tourism.

Most of the envisaged work carried on the Core Paths is likely to be small scale maintenance, surfacing and drainage works to worn out paths where future liability placed on the Council will be low. Such low grade works on Core Paths do not require owner consent due to powers given to the Council under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Occasionally more substantial works may be carried out to upgrade accessibility on paths involving some structures including bridges and culverts. In such instances where the Council do not own the path landowner consent will be required and any agreement will address the issue of liability on a case by case basis.

(e) Staffing Implications

The delivery of the Core Paths Action Plan will be the overall responsibility of the Moray Access Manager. Implementation of the 3 year plan will be carried out by the new Core Paths Ranger the costs for which will be sourced from the Dorenell Core Paths fund subject to input from HR.

(f) Property

The Dorenell Core Paths fund will assist the Council in improving and managing those routes which are part of the Council's property portfolio notwithstanding that many of the routes are in private ownership.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

Improvements to the Core Paths network resulting from the Dorenell fund will improve the overall accessibility of the paths; collectively providing for all non-motorised users, people of all genders ages and backgrounds. All Core Paths are free to use for everyone.

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impact

The proposal helps address the climate change emergency by providing an enhanced Core Path network that provides an alternative option to motorised transport for travel and recreation helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

(i) Consultations

The Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment & Finance), Head of Environmental and Commercial Services; Senior Engineer (Transportation), Roads Maintenance Manager, Sustainable Transport Officer, Legal Services Manager, Chief Financial Officer, Equal Opportunities Officer, Strategic Planning and Development Manager , Asset Manager (Commercial Buildings), Open Space Manager, Senior Officer Economic Strategy Development, and Committee Services Officer (L Rowan) have been consulted and their comments integrated into the report.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 The Moray Core Paths Action Plan 2023-2026 produced in conjunction with the MLOAF, is proposed as the vehicle to improve and manage the selected prioritised Core Paths over the next 3 years.

8.2 A Core Paths Ranger is required to be employed for 27 months from October 2023 to implement the Action Plan.

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Background Papers: [Dorenell Wind Farm – Financial Contribution to the Moray Council for use on Moray's Core Paths](#)

[Dorenell Wind Farm Financial Contribution to the Moray Council for use on Moray's Core Paths – Strategic Framework Document 2020](#)

Ref:

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