

**ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT TEAM OUTDOOR ACCESS STRATEGY ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19**

**1. Aim 1 - Promotion of Outdoor Access**

**1.1 To help promote understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment and outdoor access to everyone, and to ensure it is at the heart of the community wellbeing, economic development and sense of place.**

1.2 Part of the team’s work is ensuring visitors and residents are provided with up to date information regarding access rights and responsibilities and ensuring that key information in relation to access provision in Aberdeenshire is easily and readily available. The “Paths and Outdoor access” website is well used and further improvements are planned during the strategy period to streamline content and enhance usability for key documents.

1.3 Core Paths provide a framework of key paths which meets community needs and at the same time minimises any potential conflict with land management. Ongoing amendments and additions to the Aberdeenshire Core Path Plan will be made during 2019/20 to keep the plan up to date and relevant to reflect changing conditions on the ground. As part of promoting Aberdeenshire’s core paths, 2700 metres of core paths were signposted during the year. Further core paths will be signposted during 2019/20 as part of an ongoing rolling programme.

1.4 The Environment Team attended 6 public events to support the Aberdeenshire Local Outdoor Access Forum (ALOAF) to promote access opportunities throughout Aberdeenshire. The Turriff Show and the Royal Northern Spring Show was a focus of promotional and public engagement work.

<b><i>Maintain and improve Outdoor Access Page</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
Number of views of outdoor access webpage	8043
<b><i>Ensure the Core Path Plan continues to be relevant and up to date</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
Up to date Core Path Plan	Updates and amendments to commence in years 2&3 of Strategy
<b><i>Progress signage of core path network</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
Length of core path signed	2,700m
<b><i>Review of promotional material for outdoor access</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
Audit of promotional material in relation to access	Completed

<b><i>Work with internal partners, external bodies and interested groups in promoting responsible outdoor access</i></b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Number of public events attended	6

## **2. Aim 2 – Ensure Development Protects and Enhances Outdoor Access Provision**

### **2.1 Provide advice, support and expertise to ensure that outdoor access is protected and enhanced in line with national and local policies.**

2.2 The Environment Team have continued to assist ongoing work for the next Local Development Plan in terms of assessing bid sites for their potential impact and opportunities in relation to access.

2.3 During the course of the year the Environment Team provided 461 informal natural heritage advice responses, involving screening for potential access issues, to Development Management through weekly/fortnightly surgeries. This reduces the amount of formal consultations needed and speeds up processing of planning applications. 57 formal written consultation responses on larger and complex applications were also provided. Monitoring on the length of time that responses took has highlighted issues with the recording system which has resulted in a lower than anticipated result. This is being investigated for recording in the future.

2.4 As part of increasing awareness of access issues in relation to Development Management, access staff delivered a specific training session for Development Management staff as part of their training days and attended each of the 6 area team meetings. Feedback from these sessions were very positive.

2.5 80 consultation responses, involving screening for access issues, was undertaken in relation to Forestry Plans and Forestry Applications.

<b><i>Provide input to national policy guidance and development</i></b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Number of national consultations responded to	0
<b><i>Provide input to Local Development Plan process</i></b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Input in to Local Development Plan process	Ongoing feedback sessions with Local Development Plan Team
<b><i>Provide consultation advice and support to the Development Management process</i></b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Total number of informal surgery responses	461
Total number of formal consultation responses	57
Percentage of formal consultations to planning applications responded to within 14 days	53.5%

Number of Development Management training days supported	1
Number of Development Management meetings attended	6
<b>Consultation advice and support for forestry applications</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Number of forestry consultations	80
<b>Consultation advice and support for agri-environment applications</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Number of agri-environment consultations	9
<b>Consultation advice and support for utility applications</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Number of utility consultations	0

### 3. Aim 3 – Upholding Access Rights

#### 3.1 To ensure that the Council is delivering its duties in relation to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 legislation

3.2 The Environment Team play a key role in ensuring that the access rights of the public and the landowner are protected and that access rights are applied responsibly. In addition to general access enquiries, the team dealt with 57 specific upholding access rights cases during the year and 9 responsible access cases. Access cases by their nature can be complicated and an amicable solution is sought as a preference. Should this not resolve the issue, as a last resort, a formal notice is served on the owners. 1 formal notice was served during the year which resolved this issue.

3.3 Work is ongoing to improve the process for how access cases are managed by access staff and to provide training and support to ALOAF to become more involved in the resolution of some access cases.

<b>Upholding access rights</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
No of access cases	57
No of formal notices served on owners of land to uphold access rights (Section 14's)	1
<b>Facilitate legitimate short term public access restrictions</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
No of temporary access rights suspensions (Section 11 Orders)	3
<b>Promote responsible access</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
No of responsible access cases	9
<b>Ensure proper process is in place relating to Council responsibilities in upholding access rights</b>	<b>2018/19</b>

Complete best practice guidance notes on upholding access rights	In progress – best practice guidance notes continue to be reviewed and updated
<b><i>Support Local Access Forum in resolution of outdoor access cases as appropriate</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
No of access cases	2 – Just started

#### **4. Aim 4 – Effective Management of Outdoor Access Infrastructure**

##### **4.1 To ensure there is a robust process and adequate funding in place for management and maintenance of outdoor access infrastructure which the Environment Team manages.**

4.2 The Environment Team has a responsibility for a number of paths and associated infrastructure throughout Aberdeenshire. A programme of works were completed at a number of locations to ensure they are fit for purpose and satisfy health and safety requirements. Works were undertaken on the Deeside Way, the Formartine and Buchan Way, Riverside Path at Port Elphinstone; Back Green Car Park at Portsoy; Crovie Viewpoint Car Park, Crovie Sneuk Path, St Johns Path at Gardenstown and St Fergus Car Park. Access expenditure for 2018/19 totalled £178,220

4.3 The Access Asset – Inspection and Monitoring Project progressed during the year. Upon completion, the project will deliver an integrated asset management system, similar to the one used by Landscape Services and Structures, to assist in the identification, management and monitoring of Environment Team paths, bridges and associated infrastructure. Completion of the project will be during the Strategy period, with non-motorised bridges being rolled out in 2019/20.

4.4 The development of a Community Path Information Pack progressed during the year. The pack, to be launched in 2019/20, contains guidance, information, contact details and links to further information to support community-led action on paths in Aberdeenshire.

4.5 As a pilot exercise, Torphins Path Group were provided with hand tools and equipment to undertake path maintenance around the village. This resulted in 953 volunteer hours and 685 metres of path being maintained. This model of community path maintenance will be rolled out to other community path groups.

<b><i>Implement a paths management and maintenance process</i></b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Length of core path upgraded	3,298 Metres
Money spent on core path maintenance and enhancement	£178,220
<b><i>Establish a robust monitoring and inspection regime for paths and access related assets</i></b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Percentage of Environment Team paths routinely inspected as part of an inspection programme	Due for implementation in years 2&3 of Strategy
Percentage of Environment Team bridges routinely inspected as part of an inspection programme	Due for implementation in years 2&3 of Strategy
<b><i>Develop a volunteer policy and procedures to increase volunteering opportunities</i></b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Volunteer hours spend on path maintenance	953 Hours
Length of path maintained by volunteers	685 Metres
<b><i>Investigate creating a path public feedback system</i></b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Develop a customer contact system for reporting path issues	Due for implementation in year 3 of Strategy

## 5. Aim 5 – Sustainable and Innovative Path Provision

### 5.1 To enable the continued development of path provision throughout Aberdeenshire without increasing the management and maintenance burden on the Council.

5.2 There has been increasing support provided by the Environment Team to existing and emerging community access groups to improve access provision within their local area. 8 community groups were supported including Mearns Community Coastal Path Group, Mearns Cycle Group, Banchory Paths Group, Torphins Paths Group, Lumphanan Paths Group, Aboyne Paths, Greener Kemnay and Meldrum Paths Group.

5.3 Development of new paths by community groups is in its infancy, as the groups have concentrated more on maintenance of existing routes, however, some groups were supported in undertaking feasibility studies for potential new paths. Torphins Path Group brought in £9,235 of external funding towards the development and improvement of paths around the village.

5.3 The Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland (OATS) received a £10,000 annual contribution from Aberdeenshire Council towards OATS core costs. This financial support facilitates the delivery of access projects throughout Aberdeenshire. OATS was originally called Upper Deeside Access Trust and more recently Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust. OATS progressed 6

community paths and were involved in feasibility studies associated with the extension of the Deeside Way and the Gordon Way.

- 5.4 The Environment Team regularly engaged with a number of external organisations on outdoor access, including Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland (now called Forestry and Land Scotland), Paths for All, Sustrans, Cairngorms National Park Authority and Aberdeen City Council. The team also regularly engaged with a number of Aberdeenshire services including Economic Development, Landscape Services, Transportation, Structures, Ranger Service, Development Management and Local Plan Policy Team.
- 5.5 Support was provided to the Structures Team for improvements to Banff Springs footbridge and also for a feasibility study to identify a long term approach to the upgrade of the bridges on the Formartine and Buchan Way. Community path advice and support was provided to the Transportation Team for the potential development of the Meldrum Meg Way.

<b><i>Promote the involvement of local path groups and other organisations in developing and managing outdoor access facilities</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
Number of local and community groups worked with	8
Length of new path developed by volunteers	Due for implementation in years 2&3 of Strategy
<b><i>Identify external funding opportunities to enhance access provision in Aberdeenshire</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
Amount of external funding accessed	£9,235
<b><i>Cross Service partnerships for path development</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
Number of cross service projects	3

## **6. Aim 6 – Continuous Improvement**

- 6.1 **Ensure the Environment Team’s work in relation to the management and promotion of outdoor access is of high quality, efficient and continually improving and responsive to customer needs.**
- 6.2 The team continues to work towards improving performance. This year a survey was carried out with Development Management to assess satisfaction with performance. The responses were very positive, however a particular area for improvement related to the formal consultation response times to Development Management. As a result systems are being reviewed as already noted in 2.3 above.
- 6.3 Work has continued in producing and maintaining a best practice manual on standard processes and procedures undertaken by the Environment Team. A particular focus is improving the process for how upholding access rights cases are processed.

6.4 The development of the Community Path Information Pack will assist community groups to develop a sustainable business model for path development within their communities and also clarify the level of support the Environment Team can provide to the groups. The ongoing development of the Access Asset – Inspection and Monitoring Project will improve how the Environment Team manages and maintains their paths and bridges as part of an integrated asset management system.

<b><i>Develop and Monitor the Outdoor Access Strategy and Action Plan to ensure team work meets the need and expectations of customers</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
Up to date Strategy and Action Plan	Yes
Feedback from customer reviews	Yes – Development Management Survey
<b><i>Carry out annual monitoring and produce performance reports</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
Completed annual performance report	Yes

<b><i>Maintain continuous service improvement</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
Up to date Environment Team Best Practice Manual	In progress – best practice guidance notes continue to be reviewed and updated
<b><i>Ensure that staff have the correct and up to date knowledge and skills in order to give proper advice and deliver projects as required</i></b>	<b><i>2018/19</i></b>
Completed Personal Performance /EARS/Plans	In progress
Training courses undertaken	5