

# **Core Path Planning in Fife**

## **What Are Core Paths & How Fife Council are Developing the Core Path Plan**

### **Introduction**

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives everyone statutory access rights to most land and inland water. People only have these rights if they exercise them responsibly by respecting people's privacy, safety and livelihoods, and Scotland's environment. Equally land managers have to manage their land and water responsibly in relation to access rights.

*For further information about where 'access rights' do and don't apply visit ( [www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com) )*

*For further information about 'responsible access' as detailed in the 'Scottish Outdoor Access Code' visit ( [www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com) )*

### **Core Path Plan 'Duty'**

The 'Act' places a number of new duties upon the Local Authority. These include the duty to produce a 'Core Path Plan'.

*"Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 - Section 17(1) It is the duty of the local authority; not later than three years after the coming into force of this section, to draw up a plan for a system of paths ("core paths") sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area."*

This means that Fife Council has until February 2008 to produce a Core Path Plan, sufficient for the purpose of access for Fife.

### **What are Core Paths and why have them?**

Although there are the wide ranging Access Rights under the 'Act', it is recognised that most people prefer to use paths rather than having to negotiate their own way through the countryside. The provision of Core Paths will provide people with a basic framework of 'key' paths for both visitors and local people that will be maintained, signposted, and are

selected in a manner that balances the provision for public access with the land-management and privacy needs of those who live and work in the countryside. Achieving this balance is a delicate and time consuming process that involves consulting extensively with land managers as well as the wider public.

### **The Consultation Balance**

An extensive programme of consultations with land managers, user groups and the wider public is well under way for Fife.

The importance of ensuring that the Core Paths take account of the views of as many relevant parties as possible so that the right balance of paths can be achieved, is reflected in the extensive consultations that are currently taking place.

This is particularly important for the land managing community, who, as well as having to deal with the major changes that have taken place under the 'Act', also have many other legislative requirements to meet including health and safety and food production standards.

A detailed consultation plan provides the details of where and when the consultations take place. (contact us for more info on this)

### **Who is involved?**

Striking the 'right balance' between providing Core Paths and taking account of the various issues in the countryside requires a detailed consultation and survey process that aims to take account of all relevant stakeholders. These include:

- Land managers e.g. farms, estates, golf courses, caravan parks, forestry, parks etc
- Countryside residents
- User groups e.g. Horseriders, Canoeists, Walkers, Cyclists, Pushchair Users, Users with a disability, Etc
- Community groups
- The wider public
- Neighbouring Local Authorities
- Other organisations e.g Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Water, etc.

## Who or What Guides the Core Path Planning Process?

The guidance for Core Path Planning comes from the following sources:

- The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003
- The Scottish Executive's:  
*Part 1: Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003*  
*Guidance for Local Authorities and National Park Authorities*
- The Paths for All Partnership:  
*Core Paths Plans: A Guide to Good Practice*

From this guidance come several key principles that help to shape the Core Path Plan. These are explained next.

## Core Path Planning - Guiding Principles

- **A Basic Framework/A Minority of Key Routes**

Core Paths will not include all routes but aim to identify and designate the 'key' paths & routes in any given area.

- **Meaningfulness**

The Core Path Networks aims to be enjoyable, practical and diverse. 'Meaningfulness' includes looking at the following:

***Links between 'Local Path Networks'*** - In every local area there is a network of existing paths, farm tracks, rights of way, footways, quiet country lanes, woodland tracks & trails, made and unmade paths etc. Core Paths aim to provide links between these path networks so people can gain comfortable access to the wider countryside.

***Links between 'Neighbouring Communities'*** - In a time of 'Sustainability & Healthy Living' the demand for off-road routes so people can get to work, school or visit friends whilst leaving the car at home is on the increase. Core Path Planning will consider such routes.

***Where People Live*** - Many people want to start their journey from home. Core Path Planning will aim to provide a high number of routes that start and finish at the town or village. In addition, core paths will go through towns and villages - this will help visitors to an area to find their way through towns to the rest of the network.

***Where People want to go*** - Fife's countryside is amongst the most diverse and beautiful in Scotland. Core Path Planning will aim to take people to the best of Fife's countryside.

***Short, Medium and Longer Distance Routes*** - Different people prefer different types of routes. Some go for short local journeys,

others journeys that will take a few hours, and others routes that will provide them with a whole days travelling or longer. Core Path Planning will aim to provide a network of short, medium and longer distance routes that will meet the needs of the many.

- **Path & Surface Types**

There is no one 'surface type or path style' that would make a core path. Indeed a core path that is 1km in length may consist of various sections of made up paths, farm tracks, woodland trails, pavements or modified road verges and quiet country lanes that are linked up to provide a single route. Many of the proposed core paths will remain as the path type that they currently are and will, if necessary, be upgraded to a standard or style that is sensitive to the scenic character of that area. The creation of brand new paths in this first Core Path Plan will be minimal, with the majority of Core Paths being existing routes.

- **As Barrier Free as Possible**

Core Paths aim to be as barrier free as possible so that wherever practical a wide range of user types and people of various mobility restrictions can use the path network as easily as possible. Although some barriers are all but impossible to remove such as very steep gradients, there are ways that unimpeded access can be achieved, for example replacing a stile with a self closing gate, making sure gates are unlocked etc.

- **Maintenance**

The Core Path Network will have a basic level of maintenance to ensure that the routes are passable and kept in a reasonable condition. This maintenance responsibility will be met in a combination of ways. These include 'Land Management Contracts' whereby land managers themselves take on the maintenance and upgrading of paths, existing maintenance teams within Fife Council, community group projects etc. funding for maintenance has already been promised by the Scottish Executive. All core paths will be patrolled on a regular basis and a programme of works will be developed to meet the maintenance requirements.

- **Promotion & Signage**

Promotion for the Core Path Network will primarily be through map(s) that will show the network, and which may well show other path/route types throughout Fife e.g. cycleways/cycle routes, other signed paths etc. Using such maps people will be able to plan out their journeys choosing routes that suit their objectives and level of ability.

Signage for the network will be minimal and sensitive to the character of the local landscape. The signs may well show the distance to significant places and will be easily identifiable as Core Paths. These will be complimented by waymarkers to reassure users that they are on the right track. Additional signage may be used where there are sensitive issues that need to be brought to the attention of the user or where the route is particularly suitable for a specific user group.

- **Respectful of Privacy & Land Use**

The coming of the Land Reform Act and the various duties including core paths, bring about a huge and sudden change in the management of public access in the outdoors. Although the Act and the 'Scottish Outdoor Access Code' give clear guidance on 'responsible' access, there are many understandable concerns among the land managing community about such issues as public safety, privacy and interruptions to management operations. A key aim of the Core Path Planning process, and indeed the very spirit of the Land Reform Act is about striking the balance between providing core paths and respecting the needs of those who live and work in the countryside.

To achieve this end the Core Path Planning process will continue to consult extensively with the land management community as well as the wider public.

### **The Role of Fife Access Forum in Core Path Planning**

In addition to those guiding principles mentioned above, the Fife Access Forum plays a role in steering the Core Path Planning process. The Forum includes representatives of communities, land managers, user groups and other relevant organisations, and helps to ensure that the process gives everyone a fair opportunity to become involved.

The 'Forum' has been actively involved in approving the Core Path Planning processes currently being used.

*For further information on Fife Access Forum visit*  
( [www.fifedirect.org.uk/fifeaccessforum](http://www.fifedirect.org.uk/fifeaccessforum) )