

Scottish Natural Heritage

# Paths — linking people, places and nature



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## Document History

Issues and Revisions	Summary and SNH's Approach	Background and Context	Implementation Guidance
First issued	March 2010	March 2010	March 2010
Revised			

## Document Status

(at March 2010) **Green** - current

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# Paths – linking people, places and nature

## Summary

Reference	2010/1
Issued	March 2010
Last revised	



- 1 Paths are an important way to encourage access to, and enjoyment of, Scotland's outdoors. Paths are also a key tool for managing land and access together. They are increasingly recognised as part of the essential infrastructure required to support health, tourism and active travel by foot or bike and as such they contribute to the Government's five strategic priorities, notably to health and the environment.
- 2 Significant progress on delivering paths has been made over the last decade. Many paths have been created and signposted, additional long distance routes have become established and many popular mountain paths have been successfully restored. Making paths more accessible to everyone and encouraging their use can be achieved through the continued improvement, management and promotion of established networks. In particular, there are opportunities to encourage physical activity, contact with nature and active travel by:
  - building in path networks and greenspace as part of new housing, schools, hospitals and business and retail parks;
  - increasing the links between traffic-free facilities for walking and cycling in the centre of settlements with surrounding paths networks in the urban fringe and beyond, and with train and bus stations;
  - improving links to and networks around parks, nature reserves, other sites important for outdoor recreation and sport, and visitor attractions; and
  - promoting and developing new longer distance routes which encourage increased participation in outdoor recreation or support local tourism.

- 3 SNH can provide leadership, guidance and advice to support the planning, management and funding of paths . Our vision is that:
  - paths are promoted well;
  - paths are used more regularly and new users are attracted;
  - local paths will support local needs for outdoor recreation and active travel effectively, by being well sited, in good condition and attractive to all users;
  - a more coherent network of long distance routes will inspire more people to enjoy more of Scotland's outdoors;
  - improvements to upland paths will protect our finest mountain landscapes and provide sustainable access; and
  - funding is targeted to support this vision.
- 4 Benefits flowing from this will include: a healthier and more physically active population; people in closer contact with nature and enjoying the outdoors more frequently; economic benefits through tourism and support to land managers; and decreased carbon emissions through people using this alternative to cars.
- 5 Achieving these benefits will need sustained and collective action by Scottish Government and its agencies, local authorities, communities, land managers and other key partners. Key tasks include:
  - implementing core paths plans;
  - reviewing priorities for further local paths delivery;
  - enhancing and promoting the network of long distance routes;
  - coordinating the improvement of paths information;
  - making the case for improved investment; and
  - agreeing a framework for paths monitoring.
- 6 SNH will work with partners to take forward a range of action necessary to support this work and to champion paths and the benefits they deliver for people and nature.

Reference	2010/1
Issued	March 2010
Last revised	

# Paths – linking people, places and nature

## SNH's Approach



### Introduction

- 1 Paths play an important part in providing people with opportunities for enjoying the outdoors, for physical activity and for active travel throughout Scotland. Through proper provision they can be enjoyed by everyone and provide a key tool for managing land and access together.
- 2 Paths contribute to a range of Scottish Government's priorities including health and well-being, better place-making, tourism, the economy and action on climate change. There is potential to extend and make more use of paths to increase levels of participation in Scotland. This requires better development, promotion and management of paths. Effective co-ordination, leadership and partnership working is key to achieving these aims.
- 3 SNH has prepared this statement in order to provide this leadership and direction for paths related activity in Scotland within the context provided by Scottish Government. It proposes strategic priorities for local paths networks, longer distance routes, and upland paths, and outlines how SNH will help to support the delivery of this work. The statement has been prepared with close involvement from a number of key stakeholders involved in the funding, delivery, management and use of paths, including access authorities, Government agencies, land managers and environmental and recreational NGOs. It has been subject to formal consultation and the statutory processes of Strategic Environmental Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment.

## Our vision

### Our vision is that:

- Paths are promoted well.
- Paths are used more regularly and new users are attracted.
- Local paths will support local needs for outdoor recreation and active travel effectively, by being well sited, in good condition and attractive to all users.
- A more coherent network of long distance routes will inspire more people to enjoy more of Scotland's outdoors.
- Improvements to upland paths will protect our finest mountain landscapes and provide sustainable access.
- Funding is targeted to support this vision.

Benefits flowing from this will include: a healthier and more physically active population; people in closer contact with nature and enjoying the outdoors more frequently; economic benefits through tourism and support to land managers; and decreased carbon emissions through people using this alternative to cars.



## Section 1 – Strategic Action on Paths

### Refreshing paths planning

- 4 Government has recognised that paths have a role to play in achieving many of its aims. This is reflected in a number of policy statements supporting the better provision of paths (e.g. the Scottish Rural Development Plan, National Physical Activity Strategy, Scottish Planning Policy, Scotland's National Transport Strategy, Scottish Forestry Strategy and Reaching Higher). In addition, paths can play an important role in implementing a range of specific government initiatives such as *Smarter Choices, Smarter Places, Equally Well, Good Places Better Health, the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative* and the *Cycling Action Plan for Scotland*. Delivering across this policy framework will require continued effort to ensure that path provision and management is built into national and local decision making, including single outcome agreements<sup>1</sup>, and to integrate them effectively with related action to promote Enjoying the Outdoors<sup>2</sup>.

### Broadening paths purposes

- 5 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act, 2003 recognises the important role that paths play in supporting enjoyment of, and access to, the outdoors. The use of paths for recreation and active travel contributes to improved levels of physical activity and mental well-being, and participation levels will be an important consideration in assessing new paths proposals, particularly for new users<sup>3</sup>. Other factors will be the management of high levels of existing demand, reducing impacts on land management, wildlife habitats and landscapes, and securing additional economic benefits from tourism.

### Developing the paths picture

- 6 The provision of new paths should help to deliver across the range of possible benefits. This will require a range of information sources, including community consultation and engaging knowledgeable paths groups and volunteers, together with the more systematic use of data on health inequalities and deprivation, tourism, and changing patterns of development and land-use in and around settlements. Land managers and developers also need more encouragement to engage positively in path planning.
- 7 Work is required to review existing arrangements for the monitoring and reporting on paths use nationally and locally and across different settings. Where data exists, we need to assess how well it is utilised, what additional information is required, and what mechanisms are available for strengthening the monitoring framework. Accurate and current data on paths will help to report the benefits of paths delivery, thus strengthening the case for more investment and targeted action.

### Improving functionality and promotion

- 8 An immediate priority for paths action by access authorities and other public bodies will be the implementation of core paths plans, once these have been adopted. Action to improve the accessibility, condition and promotion of these core paths will be important, with resources needed to be allocated to this work. Opportunities also exist to further improve the basic framework of routes, particularly in areas close to home, work or school.

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1. SNH Commissioned research – Bell Ingram (2008) Policies, Plans and Resources For Paths

2. In addition to paths, these areas include access, participation, rangers and places – see SNH Enjoying the Outdoors Implementation Framework (2009)

3. SNH Commissioned research - Macaulay Land Use Research Institute and Countryside and Community Research Institute in Cheltenham (in progress) Assessing Future Recreational Demand



### **Building more effective networks**

- 9 Paths and paths networks provide a combination of short and longer journeys for recreation and active travel. Good examples already exist where local paths networks are strengthened by long distance routes. Upland paths may also be usefully linked with low level paths to improve accessibility and provide active travel options for outdoor recreation.
- 10 The concept of multi-purpose green networks is also gathering pace<sup>4</sup>, in which paths can provide wider environmental and social benefits. Country and Regional Parks, Local Nature Reserves and other visitor attractions in the countryside can act as important hubs for paths developments and can enhance the experience of visitors. Paths and routes which improve access to and on inland water and the coast can also help to strengthen the overall function and attraction of networks.
- 11 Improving provision across all types of paths can draw on existing resources, e.g. farm, forestry and estate tracks and the National Cycle Networks and canal corridors. New paths may also be necessary to address missing links where these are identified. To help achieve this, joint planning of local and long distance routes should be considered.

### **Promotion and marketing**

- 12 Many people in Scotland are unaware of the paths which they could be making use of and, as a result, many paths are currently under-used. The promotion and marketing of paths and their benefits, alongside other ways to enjoy the outdoors, is an important means of increasing participation. Varied actions include improving signposting, waymarking, map and leaflet provision, involving local walking or cycling initiatives, features in the press and media, and improving information on public transport and other facilities. Such action provides opportunities to promote the wider social and environmental benefits of participation, and to improve levels of responsible use, particularly by new users.
- 13 Web technology will have an important role in making paths information more easily accessible for all. Better co-ordination of effort, including on research, and a stronger customer-focus will be important in delivering a good range of on-line products targeted at relevant audiences, especially for new users. The creation of a dataset for promoted paths in Scotland would be an important resource for underpinning these approaches to promoting the outdoors and improving participation levels.

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4. see National Planning Framework 2, Scottish Government, 2009

## Maximising investment

- 14 Funding for paths development, management and promotion is likely to be more difficult to access during the next decade, particularly for local authorities. It will therefore be important to make best use of scarce resources through effective partnerships and joint working. It will be important to maximise available funding by linking the wider benefits of paths to health, transport, economic and tourism agendas, and mainstreaming paths development into local authority working practices.
- 15 Many access authorities, land managers and NGOs have made successful use of various external funding streams for paths related work, though this has tended to be for capital works and a scarcity of maintenance funding for all paths types remains a problem. In some places, countryside trusts have played a prominent role in funding, developing and managing paths. These examples of good practice in funding paths creation and maintenance should be promoted and adopted more generally. The potential for paths funding through the Scottish Rural Development Plan should also be fully explored and developed further.
- 16 It is difficult to estimate full expenditure on paths by public bodies and funders, largely because few organisations maintain specific financial records<sup>5</sup>. Assessing the overall funding needs for paths and identifying a clear basis for seeking improved investment is also difficult. There is therefore a need for further research on paths funding, covering expenditure levels, funding needs and all potential sources. Ongoing discussions between government, public agencies and access authorities will be essential to maintain awareness of funding needs and to help target fundraising and expenditure on the whole life costs of paths in support of long term delivery and management.

### Summary of strategic action on paths

- Champion the benefits of paths for people and nature and the contribution they make to Scottish Government objectives.
- Review the amount and distribution of paths and identify priorities for further paths to maximise participation, strengthen multi-functional use and make best use of available resources.
- Coordinate and support the development of information on paths, including web-based provision.
- Investigate paths expenditure and funding needs and make the case for improved investment in existing and new paths.
- Agree a framework for action to improve paths monitoring.

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5. SNH Commissioned research – Bell Ingram (2008) Policies, Plans and Resources For Paths

## Section 2 – Action For Paths In Different Settings

### Local paths networks

- 17 An emphasis on local access in the last decade has significantly improved paths provision. However, there are indications that demand for local paths is still greater than supply. Provision is still patchy in terms of the coverage and quality of paths, with specific opportunities for cycling, horse-riding and for people with disabilities often limited. Equality issues need to be addressed better during paths project planning and promotion. The 5 year review of Scotland's physical activity strategy concluded that 'the creation and provision of environments that encourage and support physical activity offers the greatest potential to get the nation active', while a recent Parliamentary inquiry into active travel also underlines that there is still much that can be done to increase use of paths for local travel<sup>6</sup>.
- 18 Access authorities have the main role to play in bringing about further progress on local paths. Core paths plans, once implemented, are expected to significantly consolidate local paths networks and, through this, to provide better access to the wider countryside. Access authorities are encouraged to keep overall provision under review and to further strengthen the networks by the following actions:
  - implement priority paths proposals, identified through core path plans and other community consultations;
  - respond to plans for new housing, schools, hospitals and business and retail parks by ensuring that paths provide for active travel to and from these places;
  - link traffic-free facilities for walking and cycling in the centre of settlements with surrounding paths networks in the urban fringe and beyond, and with train and bus stations where feasible; and
  - improving links to and networks around parks, nature reserves, other sites important for outdoor recreation and sport, and visitor attractions.
- 19 The planning and design of new developments create opportunities to improve paths provision and use. Development plans should promote 'walkability' in settlement design, while master planning approaches and the use of developer contributions can help translate these policies into practice. The roads network, including designated cycle lanes, also has an important role to play in supplementing and strengthening paths work. Quiet and safe roads can create useful links where separate paths development is not feasible or unaffordable in the short term or where a road actually offers a very adequate facility for users. The designation of a road as a core path can provide impetus for traffic calming measures or the creation of a parallel path at a later date when resources allow.
- 20 Innovative approaches to implementation and funding will be required. Major employers may support paths and their promotion in relation to "healthy workplace" initiatives and social responsibility programmes. Community groups are usually eligible for many paths funding sources, for example the Scottish Rural Development Programme and, through securing these, can help local authorities achieve their priorities.

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6. See NHS Health Scotland (2009) 5 year review of Lets Make Scotland More Active and Transport, and Scottish Parliament Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee (2010) Inquiry into active travel.

## Summary of key actions

### Local

- Implement core paths plans to ensure that the basic network of routes exists.
- Keep under review the extent to which paths are satisfying community needs and assess priorities for further improvements.
- Widen the resource and partnership bases for funding to help lever funding from external sources.

### National

- Review the strengths and weaknesses of core paths plans and develop a national perspective on demand for further paths development.
- Pilot and demonstrate good practice on improving local paths networks and increasing levels of use.
- Review the mechanisms by which paths are planned, created, protected and managed.
- Increase awareness and accessibility of funding sources.

## Long distance routes

- 21 A growing network of strategic routes has emerged in Scotland over the last twenty or more years. The four officially designated long distance routes are now complemented by many additional routes which are either waymarked or described by guidebooks or websites. Overall this provision is an estimated 4,000 km in length. In addition, the National Cycle Network (NCN) in Scotland provides 2,200 km of strategic routes, offering traffic free or quiet roads for safe and sustainable journeys for active travel, recreation and tourism.
- 22 Long distance routes are of value because they:
  - allow people, particularly those of limited experience, to plan and undertake challenging adventures;
  - provide economic tourism benefits to the communities and businesses through which they pass;
  - offer opportunities for healthy activity holidays and short breaks;
  - help to improve awareness of the natural heritage, land management, and history of the areas through which they pass; and
  - can create important links with local path networks and provide local transport opportunities through walking and cycling.
- 23 At present, it is difficult to describe the extent and quality of a network of long distance routes as, individually, they vary in character, length, terrain, infrastructure and promotion, level of management and there are no agreed criteria for inclusion. While facilities for walking are improving, provisions for cycling, horse-riding, and canoeing are less extensive. Management arrangements are varied and promotion remains piecemeal. There is a need to find out more about existing routes, including their condition and levels of use, and to consider ways of strengthening and promoting them. Options for identifying and branding a recognised network of Scottish long distance routes should also be investigated.
- 24 The market for longer distance routes is changing, with an increasing proportion of inexperienced walkers and people seeking routes which are achievable within 3-4 days. Long distance cycling and horse-riding is also thought to be increasing annually

as awareness, opportunities and confidence in tackling longer trips increases. Through a combination of factors, more people may stay in Scotland for holidays. Climatic and demographic changes may also impact on tourism and recreation patterns and on the physical condition of paths and their management.

- 25 Overall, the network is not comprehensive in its geographical coverage and significant potential exists to improve provision by:
- linking existing routes;
  - improving and promoting existing coastal paths to create continuity for longer distance journeys;
  - creating a coast to coast route which is widely accessible to the central belt; and
  - developing water-based routes and better provision for cycling and horse-riding to complement provision through the NCN.

Common factors which are critical to the success of long distance routes have been identified by research<sup>7</sup>, and these should be promoted to underpin the improvement of existing routes and planning of new routes.

- 26 SNH no longer expects to make use of the Countryside (Scotland) Act, 1967 powers for establishing long distance routes, as we believe that “bottom-up” partnership approaches are more effective. We are keen to promote quality implementation and management for all routes appropriate to terrain and type of use and to strengthen the family of long distance routes in Scotland. We may also contribute to feasibility studies and establishment costs, and assist in the scoping and co-ordination of new proposals where these are complex, or involve a number of local authorities.

## Summary of key actions

### Local

- Maintain existing routes and develop them as required to improve quality and participation levels and to support multi-use where feasible.
- Scope and develop new routes that will increase participation and deliver significant benefits for tourism, health and active travel.

### National

- Develop a better understanding of existing long distance routes, and identify priorities for strengthening the network.
- Define and promote the common factors identified by research as critical to the success of long distance routes.
- Establish criteria and branding to promote a recognised network of long distance routes in Scotland.
- Assist discussions on Ministerial suggestions for the proposed development of a Pilgrims Way and a Scottish Coastal Way.

7. SNH commissioned research – Vyv Wood-Gee, Countryside Management Consultant (2008) Long Distance Recreational Routes



## Upland paths

- 27 Significant progress has been made in the last 10 years and more in repairing upland paths and managing the visitors who come to enjoy our mountains, hills and moorlands. The key interest groups - public agencies, landowners, users and contractors, have collaborated to tackle existing impacts and to help minimise the future impacts of recreation. In particular, The Footpath Trust and the Upland Paths Advisory Groups have improved capacity in the industry through coordinating training and vocational qualifications and preparing and promoting good practice technical guidance. Many of our popular mountain ranges have seen extensive and high quality repair work, and effective approaches to visitor management planning have been pioneered by the National Trust for Scotland, Nevis Partnership and the Cairngorms National Park Authority.
- 28 An important focus of upland paths work is on safeguarding and enhancing the landscape, and in protecting important habitats, a reflection of the high value we place on our wild places for enjoyment and conservation. This should continue. In addition, there is a need to consider the following factors:
- many hill ranges in lowland areas are experiencing higher use levels as a result of changing leisure patterns and improved accessibility;
  - the demand for tackling the Munros has extended to other peaks across the uplands;
  - the new access legislation may lead to more use of the uplands by cyclists and horse-riders;
  - more lower level circular routes in mountain areas should be developed to help cater for a wider range of visitors, especially those not seeking the higher slopes; and
  - there is a need for improved planning and management techniques to respond to the impacts of climate change.



- 29 A significant challenge in tackling these issues is the difficulty in securing funds for essential routine maintenance without which there will be serious impacts on the infrastructure, use patterns and the environment. A consequence of this is that light touch pre-emptive works appropriate to wild land settings are passed over in favour of more heavily engineered options for which capital funds are sometimes available. In recent years, the National Trust for Scotland has trialled approaches and techniques for less intrusive path management using an in-house demonstration team, and useful conclusions have been drawn relating to the quality and cost-effectiveness of these approaches.
- 30 While there has been some progress, the adoption of management standards remains patchy and inappropriate work continues in places, often due to poor survey, procurement and project management. Funding bodies need to be persuaded to insist on work being carried out to the agreed national standards and to monitor funding conditions. Industry capacity, having improved as a result of former training initiatives, is once again in decline, a consequence of poor funding availability and of specialist contractors diversifying into other areas of work. Overall, there is a need to better prioritise efforts and target the resource for paths work, focussing on where most people go and improving visitor management techniques.

## Summary of key actions

### Local

- Continue to develop more strategic approaches for managing the impacts of concentrated visitor activity, and identify ways of prioritising paths repairs for regions and specific mountain ranges.
- Help define and deliver standards for delivering quality upland pathwork agreed by public agencies and funding bodies.

### National

- Pilot and demonstrate good practice techniques and guidance, especially on light-touch pre-emptive repairs, and developing new solutions for managing responsible cycling and horse-riding where this is appropriate.
- Increase capacity within the contracting industry through training and guidance, taking account of overlaps between upland and lowland paths management practices.

## Section 3 – Improving paths design and construction

- 31 Over the last decade, guidance on good practice for paths has improved significantly, including construction and management, signage and access designs, bridges and car parks, and paths promotion and marketing. Many visible improvements on the ground in both lowland and upland settings are partly attributable to this guidance. As a result of legislation on equalities, there has also been a general move towards providing barrier free access and shared use facilities, and more evidence of self closing gates replacing stiles and well graded ramps replacing steps. Good improvements have also been made in our understanding of the potential impacts of paths and users on habitats and species sensitive to damage and disturbance. More advice is now available to paths managers on avoiding and mitigating these impacts.
- 32 Ongoing support and encouragement is required to help paths managers to continue to deliver quality paths, minimise the impacts of paths users, ensure that construction is sympathetic to the natural heritage, resolve multi-use issues, improve approaches to access for all provision, and ensure that routine maintenance is planned for and carried out. New challenges in the design and construction of paths will also need to be addressed as the impacts of climate change become more evident.

### Summary of key actions

#### Local

- Use good practice in the design and maintenance of paths in all settings.
- Influence behavioural change through effective paths management and promotion in support of the access education programme.

#### National

- Promote revised signage guidance which encourages compliance with access legislation and local distinctiveness.
- Further improve lowland and upland paths technical guidance, including the management of multi-use and related surfacing issues, and develop an approach to delivering access for all standards.
- Investigate the use of key paths attributes to help users make informed choices about using paths.
- Promote the benefits of maintenance for all types of paths, and encourage routine maintenance to be planned and undertaken.
- Investigate climate change trends affecting paths and devise solutions to identified impacts.

## Section 4 – SNH's role and key priorities

- 33 Delivering this agenda for Scotland's paths will require collective action by Scottish Government and its agencies, local authorities, communities, voluntary organisations, land managers and other businesses. SNH has an important strategic role to play and our main roles and activities are summarised in Table 1.
- 34 Key SNH actions for the period 2010–13 are set out separately in the implementation guidance published to accompany this statement. We recognise that these actions alone will not be sufficient to achieve all the outcomes that we are seeking and sustained action will be required in the longer term to yield the range of public benefits we believe paths can deliver for Scotland's people.

**Table 1 Main roles and Activities for SNH**

<b>Key priorities for paths</b>	<b>Main roles and activities for SNH</b>
<b>Strengthening strategic action for paths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provision of leadership, guidance and advice in identifying, improving and promoting use of the path resource in Scotland.</li> <li>● Championing paths and the benefits they deliver for people and nature.</li> </ul>
<b>Local path networks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provision of advice nationally and locally.</li> <li>● Promoting new approaches to paths planning and delivery which encourage better linkages between local paths and strategic routes and contribute to multi-purpose green network developments.</li> <li>● Provide advice and support to access authorities on the next steps for local paths delivery; helping to pilot and deliver new approaches.</li> </ul>
<b>Long distance routes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provision of leadership in identifying, improving and promoting the network.</li> <li>● Support for planning and development of new routes and promoting their use.</li> </ul>
<b>Upland paths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provision of leadership and coordinating action by key partners on improving technical guidance, management standards and improving industry skills and capacity.</li> <li>● Support for planning and development of new paths and promoting their use.</li> </ul>
<b>Paths design and construction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Encouraging good practice in the design and maintenance of paths in all settings, including on land we own and manage.</li> <li>● Influencing behavioural change in support of the access education programme.</li> </ul>

Reference	2010/1
Issued	March 2010
Last revised	

# Paths – linking people, places and nature

## Background and Context



### Roles, values and definitions

- 1 Paths can significantly help to facilitate access and help to safeguard the interests of land managers and the environment. Although access rights and responsibilities apply to most land and inland water, a high proportion of people rely on paths for outdoors leisure and recreation (74%) and, of these, nearly half use signposted or waymarked paths<sup>8</sup>.
- 2 The term “path” is used here in its widest sense. It includes paths for both recreation and everyday journeys and for different modes of use – walking, cycling, horse-riding, all abilities and others; paths of different construction types, spanning earth or grass trods to fully accessible quality surfaces; paths of different status (core paths, rights of way, safe public roads), and also ‘routes’ for journeys on water.

8. SNH commissioned research – TNS (2007) Scottish Recreation Survey

## Background and recent progress

- 3 In the past, Scotland had an established but limited rights of way and long distance route system, supplemented by permissive paths and other non-statutory provision. In the 1990's, the Paths for All initiative sought to develop new approaches to local paths delivery based on better partnership working at national and local level.

As a result, access authorities successfully developed outdoor access strategies, established local access forums and undertook consultative paths planning exercises. However, progress on the actual provision of paths on the ground was still slow as a result of land managers' concerns and resource constraints.

- 4 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act, 2003 introduced important changes for the planning, delivery and management of paths. The main implications are that paths can be used as of right by everyone, subject to responsible use, can include routes on inland water, and that shared use is now considered as the norm. The legislation recognised and mainstreamed approaches promoted by the Paths for All initiative through setting out new duties for access authorities to prepare core paths plans and establish local access forums. A further duty on access authorities to uphold access rights, including on paths, marked a fundamental shift in the status of paths.
- 5 Progress has also been made in clarifying and improving understanding of liability law through legislation, research and guidance. The adoption of good practice in paths delivery, in combination with responsible use and management, will help to reduce hazards and risks for all parties. Disability discrimination law has successfully driven new and innovative approaches to planning and designing for inclusive paths and access management, though it is recognised that further work is required to improve attitudes, remove physical and social barriers and improve information provision.
- 6 Significant progress on delivering paths and related infrastructure has been made over the last decade:
- more local paths have been created in the right places and promoted;
  - the signposting of public rights of way has greatly improved;
  - the Great Glen Way, National Cycle Network and other longer routes have become established; and
  - many popular mountain paths have been successfully restored and landscapes enhanced.
- 7 There is an estimated total of 84,000 km of paths and tracks in Scotland<sup>9</sup> with 20,500 km reported as being signposted or waymarked<sup>10</sup>. It is expected that this figure will increase further as the paths network is consolidated and enhanced through the implementation of core paths plans. However, it is unlikely that core paths will meet the full aspirations of existing users and address latent demand. Indications are that local paths networks remain patchy in distribution and issues relating to accessibility, quality and promotion still need addressed. We also need to find out more about how paths are being used and what contribution they are making to health improvements and active travel.
- 8 Exciting opportunities exist to strengthen the network of national routes, to provide more traffic-free options for longer journeys by cyclists and horse riders, and to create more economic benefits through linking the network to more communities.

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9. SNH commissioned research – Survey Development Services (2002) Scottish Paths Record

10. Scottish Government (2009) Monitoring of Access Authorities

## Drivers for the future

- 9 Paths can be used for a range of everyday and recreational purposes, which contribute to social, environmental and economic benefits for individuals and society as a whole. Key policy drivers for change include the following.

### Physical activity and healthy living

- 10 The National Physical Activity Strategy highlights the role of paths in healthy environments as an important means of encouraging walking and cycling<sup>11</sup>. Policy makers are increasingly recognising that access to and enjoyment of well designed and managed natural environments can make a significant contribution to improving public health<sup>12</sup>.

### Enjoyment of the natural heritage

- 11 There is ample evidence of the positive impacts that accessible, quality natural heritage has on physical and mental health. It also remains one of the key drivers for tourism in Scotland. Paths provision is of great importance in making the natural heritage more accessible, both in and around settlements and in the wider countryside. Recent research<sup>13</sup> demonstrates that users value paths for physical health and emotional wellbeing improvements and for reducing car use.

### Active travel

- 12 Paths provision is of great importance in improving opportunities for non-motorised transport by increasing physical activity through walking and cycling while reducing carbon emissions and countering climate change. All 354 million trips made on the UK wide National Cycle Network in 2007 represent a potential saving of 450,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

### Attractive places to live

- 13 Paths networks, combined with local greenspace and landscapes, can contribute to attractive settings where people can appreciate and respect the natural heritage more and, in turn, can contribute to creating stronger, more inclusive and sustainable communities. The National Planning Framework 2 confirms Scottish Government's support for the creation of multi-purpose green networks to benefit habitats, species, landscapes and people.

### Climate Change

- 14 Other social and economic factors such as the economy and technical change will influence demand for paths. Climate change is also likely to have a number of implications for paths in Scotland, particularly in relation to changes in rainfall and temperature. This may alter tourism and recreation patterns and pressures, especially in more accessible areas of Scotland and where there are popular visitor attractions. As a result, there may be new challenges in effectively monitoring and managing these impacts, and we need to ensure that advice and guidance will deliver sufficiently robust solutions to cope with these potential changes.

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11. Scottish Government (2003) Lets make Scotland More Active

12. National Institute for Clinical Excellence Guidelines (2008) Promoting and creating built and natural environments that encourage and support physical activity

13. (PFAP, HIE, SNH, 2007) An economic and social impact study of local path networks

**Table 2 Proposed Actions on Paths 2010–13**

Key priorities for paths	Main roles and activities for SNH	Specific SNH actions
<b>Strengthening strategic action for paths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provision of leadership, guidance and advice in identifying, improving and promoting use of the path resource in Scotland.</li> <li>● Championing paths and the benefits they deliver for people and nature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Advising Government on planning and transport policies and in establishing national and regional priorities in the SRDP.</li> <li>● Progressing research to review the impact of core paths and to identify priorities for targeting further delivery of paths.</li> <li>● Undertaking more detailed monitoring on levels and types of paths use in different settings.</li> <li>● Working with key partners to improve the amount, quality and accessibility of information.</li> </ul>
<b>Local path networks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provision of advice nationally and locally.</li> <li>● Promoting new approaches to paths planning and delivery which encourage better linkages between local paths and strategic routes and contribute to multi-purpose green network developments.</li> <li>● Provide advice and support to access authorities on the next steps for local paths delivery; helping to pilot and deliver new approaches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Supporting local paths provision in development plans, local transport strategies and SRDP applications.</li> <li>● Working with local authorities and others to develop and promote best practice in the planning and design of paths as part of green networks and more sustainable places.</li> <li>● Provide support for targeted activity with access authorities and community groups.</li> </ul>
<b>Long distance routes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provision of leadership in identifying, improving and promoting the network.</li> <li>● Support for planning and development of new routes and promoting their use.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Working with VisitScotland and others to map the existing network and to develop and promote a stronger 'LDR' brand.</li> <li>● Working with key partners to improve quality of existing provision, and to identify network gaps and opportunities for new route developments.</li> <li>● Contributing to feasibility studies and establishment costs to help target new route developments.</li> <li>● Assisting in discussion on Ministerial suggestions for a Pilgrims Way and Scottish Coastal Way.</li> </ul>
<b>Upland paths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provision of leadership and coordinating action by key partners on improving technical guidance, management standards and improving industry skills and capacity.</li> <li>● Support for planning and development of new paths and promoting their use.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Preparing and promoting guidance on strategic approaches to visitor management and paths repairs.</li> <li>● Working with path managers and funders to increase the adoption of agreed standards.</li> <li>● Contributing to partnership funding arrangements for repair works and trial new light touch and pre-emptive approaches.</li> </ul>
<b>Paths design and construction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Encouraging good practice in the design and maintenance of paths in all settings, including on land we own and manage.</li> <li>● Influencing behavioural change in support of the access education programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide support for a technical programme on paths design and maintenance.</li> <li>● Investigating climate change trends and potential impacts on paths.</li> </ul>







### SNH commitment to customers

- We will ask customers for their views
- We will put things right if they go wrong
- We will give high standards of customer care
- We will publish our customer care performance

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ISBN: 978-1-85397-611-7

Print Code: M0.4K0410

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