



Lobbying for Local Path Networks

Introduction

Many people value the opportunity to get out and about using paths, but not everyone knows how to influence local authorities, landowners and other organisations to help improve paths in their area. This factsheet sets out how national and local government works in relation to paths and access and gives you some ideas on how you can lobby for the paths in your area.

National government and paths

The Scottish Government controls our access laws and most of the public money which could potentially be used to fund paths, so if you're hoping to develop paths in Scotland they should be your main focus. However you need to be aware that some associated legislation and policy comes from the UK (or Westminster) Government.

The Scottish Government has set five strategic objectives for Scotland to be a wealthier, healthier, safer, smarter and greener nation. As part of meeting those objectives, Scotland now has its own climate change laws, which were introduced with the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. This Act aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage a change to a 'low-carbon economy'. A key element of this is '[sustainable transport](#)' which includes a focus on 'active travel' – cycling and walking. When new routes are designed a key objective is that they should be planned not just for recreation, but also for getting to work, school, shops and other public facilities where possible.

More recently, concern has grown throughout the UK over the state of our health. Rising rates of obesity, strokes, cancer and heart disease have all been linked to decreasing rates of physical activity. Making Scotland a healthier nation is likely to continue to be an important objective for the Scottish Government for many years to come, regardless of which political party is in power. Creating path networks can help people become more active by making it easier for them to walk and cycle in their local area.

The precise wording of Government objectives tends to change when a new political party gets into power. But you can be fairly sure that a quick glance through some of their policy documents will give you plenty of references to improving health and making the country more sustainable. Referring to these issues can help support your case for developing path networks in your area. For more information, have a look at www.scotland.gov.uk

Government agencies and paths

National government provides a framework of policy and guidance, which is often implemented on the ground by government agencies. Within Scotland, the most relevant 'agency' for access related issues is Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). The promotion of outdoor access is a key duty for SNH, so they have a specific paths policy and they may be able to give grant assistance to some access projects. They also provide advice and guidance on the implementation of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, including the publication of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (now being promoted as '*The Code*'). Other government agencies that might be worth contacting to help you develop your path projects and lobby for local access opportunities include:

- Forestry Commission Scotland, who own a lot of the forestry land within Scotland and are, similar to SNH, a government agency.
- Your local community planning partnership who want to improve the quality of life for local people
- Your local **Community Health Partnership**, who will be interested in delivering local health improvements through increased physical activity such as walking, riding or cycling.
- Your local **Enterprise Company** (either Scottish Enterprise, or Highlands and Islands Enterprise), whose primary concern is economic competitiveness, and so may support ideas that increase the attractiveness of the local area to incoming workers, investors, or tourists.
- Your local **Tourist Board**, who will be interested in anything that promises improved facilities for tourists.

Local government and paths

The question of who you should lobby about local access has been slightly complicated by the role of Scotland's two National Parks. Each of these parks includes land which spans a number of local authority boundaries. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act gives responsibility for outdoor access provision within the national park areas to the national park authorities.

As a result, the term 'access authority' is used to refer to all 32 local authorities (or Councils) plus the two national park authorities. If the area you are interested in is within one of the national parks, you should be making contact with relevant staff in the national park authority in the first instance.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives access authorities a clear lead role in developing path networks. However, access authorities have many duties to perform and only limited resources (both in terms of time and money) to deploy. This means that paths may not always be seen as a top priority, so it's important to make sure you lobby effectively for your local paths.

How local government works

If you want to lobby for local path networks, there are two groups of people who are important to contact within your access authority – staff and elected officials (councillors or National Park

Board Members). Final decisions on local government policy, actions and spending are taken by elected officials in one or more of the Authority's committees. This means that some individuals can make a real difference to whether or not a project gets taken forward.

Most access authorities have 'access officers' usually located within the planning or environment departments. These officers, alongside other members of staff create strategies and are also involved in the detailed planning, construction, maintenance and promotion of paths. Your access authority may also have a 'cycling officer', 'countryside rangers' and 'openspace officers'. These are the most obvious people to target, but also look out for staff dealing with community regeneration, healthy living and economic development. All access authorities have their own websites, where you should be able to find information on who's doing what.

All areas in Scotland are covered by community councils. These organisations bridge the gap between local authorities and communities. They aim to make public bodies aware of the opinions and needs of the communities they represent, so they should be an early port of call when you are lobbying for local paths.

Policies, plans and priorities

Local authorities produce lots of plans and strategies – including access strategies, core paths plans, development plans, open space strategies, transport strategies and many more. What these plans all have in common is that the process of making the plan is a good way for a local authority to assess needs and canvass public opinion so it can make the best possible decisions on policies, plans and priorities.

The important thing about all these plans is that they have a significant bearing on a local authority's spending decisions. Having your path proposal included in a relevant plan won't guarantee local authority funding, but not having it included in any of these plans will make sourcing funding much harder. The process of making and reviewing these plans is your opportunity to advocate path ideas to your local authority.

Core Paths Plans and Local Access Forums

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 came into force in February 2005, and amongst other responsibilities, it placed a duty on access authorities to prepare core paths plans. These plans set out each authority's ideas for meeting the need for outdoor access in their local area.

All access authorities now have core paths plans in place, although some are still being assessed by the Scottish Government. If you want to influence how paths and access opportunities develop in your area, core paths plans are a really important document – you can download maps of your local area through your access authority's website. These plans will be reviewed and updated every few years – when this happens you should take the opportunity to be involved in the process.

The Land Reform Act has also required all access authorities to set up Local Access Forums (LAF). These forums are a mix of land managers, recreational enthusiasts, community representatives, and other organisations with an interest in outdoor access. The idea is to bring these diverse interests together to seek consensus about the best way to improve and manage outdoor access in each local area. While independent of the access authority, a successful Local Access Forum will be in a position to give invaluable advice to the authority, so gaining the Forum's support for your plans will be a big help. Local Access Forums can be

contacted 'care of' the [Access Officer](#), but bear in mind that some groups only meet two or three times per year so it may take time to get a reply directly from the forum.

Financial Planning

Local Government spending is supposed to be 'policy-led' and so it should reflect the policies, plans and priorities set out in single outcome agreements, plans and strategies. Local authorities are also supposed to apply the principle of 'best value' in their use of resources. This means that, when a policy objective has been identified, the most cost-effective way of achieving that objective should be chosen – however, this is not necessarily the same as 'cheapest'.

Local authorities are required by law to review their spending plans annually. There are two types of spending. 'Capital' spending covers large projects such as roads and is usually met by borrowing. 'Revenue' spending covers small projects and current expenses like staff wages and is financed out of council tax payments and government grants. There are usually two 'budget rounds' to allocate capital and revenue spending, starting in autumn each year and finishing early the following year.

Single outcome agreements have been created between local authorities and national government. These agreements set out how everyone will work towards improving life for local people in a way which reflects local priorities. Paths for All have produced a guidance document which explains how these single outcome agreements work in practice.

Spending should be allocated in line with the priorities set out in a single outcome agreement, so you should look at the most recent agreement produced for your area and see how your project can help deliver those priorities.

Community Planning Partnerships

Community Planning Partnerships have become an important conduit for coordinating public sector service delivery. They involve the local authority, representatives from other public sector organisations and most of the partnerships also include representatives from the local community.

Single outcome agreements include now community planning partnerships so you may be identify how your ideas could help a wider range of public sector bodies to meet their obligations to the Scottish Government.

How to Lobby

The previous sections have focused on who to target with your path lobbying. This section includes some hints and tips on how to make sure your persuasion is as effective as possible.

Put yourself in their place

You need to try and convince people why your project will help to deliver what they are trying to achieve. So if you're speaking to a local councillor, for example, you should emphasise how your path project will help to deliver some of the access authority's aims and objectives, as set out in their plans and policies. If you're talking to a representative of a government agency,

you can emphasise how your project might help to deliver some of their national and objectives.

Gain support from other local groups

Do other people want the same – or *nearly* the same – paths as you? Perhaps local parents are interested in safer routes to schools or local traders would be keen to have the new customers your paths might bring? You'll speak with a much stronger voice if you can show you have wide support.

Having more people involved also makes it easier for the authority to support you. If many groups lobby for their own, slightly different projects, how should the local authority choose between them? But if those groups unite to promote a joint project, the authority will be able to see the prospect of delivering benefits for a wide cross-section of the community.

If you can engage individuals or organisations as allies this can have a big impact. That's particularly the case for groups that traditionally have opposing aims. For example, if rambles and land-managers unite to support the same path proposal, both local and national government may be keen to help.

Look for champions

A local champion could be someone who is personally keen on paths, enjoys a position of influence and has access to key decision makers. This could be someone who already works within local or national government or who is involved in local politics. A journalist on the local paper can also wield a lot of influence and good press support can be invaluable.

Talk to the right people...at the right time

Trying to sell your ideas to people who aren't involved in outdoor access may not be the best use of your time. The information in previous sections should help you to establish who is most likely to respond to your ideas – you want to find people who have both a tangible interest and the capacity to act.

Once you've located the right people, you need to think about the best way to make contact. For staff in local authorities or government agencies, you should be able to arrange a meeting at their office. Where local councillors are concerned, you need to be sensitive to the fact that they tend to be at everyone's beck and call, and may not appreciate phone calls late in the evening. A better alternative is to arrange to meet them on site, attend one of their surgeries, or invite them to attend a meeting of your path group.

Bear in mind **when** financial resources are allocated within a given organisation and try to get your ideas on the table well ahead of any deadlines. Remember that staff may be under pressure close to the deadlines and less receptive to discussing new ideas at a late stage. Conversely, putting forward a carefully packaged project that could be delivered quickly could be an advantage towards the end of the year, if other projects have fallen by the wayside.

Be persistent and acknowledge assistance

It's important to find a balance between becoming a 'pain' and strongly, clearly and consistently making the same point. It will help if there are several individuals or groups who are making the same case to produce a convincing argument. But you should also make sure

you acknowledge and show appreciation for what *has* been done, before you go on to show how even more could be achieved. If you become known as someone who always complains and never offers solutions or thanks, you are unlikely to make progress.

Quote national and local objectives

If you can put forward a path idea which can be shown to make a clear contribution to national and local policy objectives, you will be helping to demonstrate that governments are delivering on their promises and legal obligations.

Show evidence of community need

Setting your path idea in the context of national and local policy objectives represents a good foundation for your case. But to really make your case, you need to bring forward evidence of community need. Wherever possible, this should be in the form of hard numbers. For example:

- a public meeting to discuss paths was attended by 80 people, demonstrating a lot of interest in expanding the opportunities available.
- a local farmer has had several instances of people not knowing where they can go, and is keen to support the development of paths to avoid a conflict between walkers and agricultural operations.
- after two accidents, the local primary school is examining the scope for safe routes to school for its 200 pupils.

Ask for something specific

If you are vague in your questions, it's easy for the person to be vague in answering. If you have a fairly detailed proposal you have a better chance of getting a detailed response. This doesn't need to be a fully specified path design and you might find that the people you are lobbying are keen to contribute their ideas as well. But it should be a more specific request than just wanting more paths. As budgets get tighter, it's also likely that well-planned proposals will be more successful in getting funding. Make sure you provide a level of detail appropriate to the person you are contacting. An access officer may want fine detail, whereas a local councillor is more likely to want an overview of your proposals.

Lead by example

You will have more credibility if you have a track record of practical community action. For example, if your path group has organised volunteers to clean up local paths, carry out minor repairs, install a bench, or plant some wildflowers, you've shown that you're prepared to contribute. Decision makers may respond more warmly to people who get involved than to those who only ever make demands.

Following up

It is often useful to follow up discussions or meetings with a letter. In it you can thank the person for their time, re-iterate the key points you made, and list any follow-up action that was agreed. You could also enclose any relevant press cuttings, articles or publications which might support what you are saying.

After the path network is built, thank those involved, invite them to open it, use their logos, praise their efforts, compliment their foresight, and give credit. This will make it a lot easier to go back with your next idea!