



The purpose of evaluating the impact of a path network is to try to understand how people are benefitting from using the paths and to quantify the size of these benefits. We have developed a questionnaire that will help you to answer these questions, and the results will also show you how the network compares with others across Scotland.

The questionnaire is designed to highlight a range of social, economic and environmental benefits and gives a simple and standardised approach to collecting the data. In order to produce a full picture showing the scale of the benefits, you will also need to collect data on the use of the network.

2.1 Social benefits



Health benefits

The physical and mental health benefits of regular exercise are well documented, and the questionnaire makes it possible to find out from users how these benefits are experienced locally.

In a survey across five path networks in the Highlands and Islands, by HECLA Consulting (referred to as the HECLA survey from here onwards), 56% of respondents felt that using their local path network has increased their physical fitness and 90% reported that they feel less stressed as a result of using the paths.

Community benefits

Research has shown that there are direct benefits from path networks in supporting social relationships and indirectly, the process of network development brings benefits in terms of increasing 'community capacity'.

Over 80% of respondents in the HECLA survey indicated that their path network helped them to meet people and feel part of the community.

2.2 Environmental benefits

The questionnaire helps to identify whether paths in a network could help to reduce the traffic on the roads or provide alternative access to local services. This type of evaluation could also help to identify the need for paths that can help people to get to work or school.

The HECLA survey revealed very low use of the networks for walking or cycling to work, and provides a challenge to encouraging greater use.

2.3 Economic benefits



The approach taken in this toolkit is called 'at least' - only visitors to the area are considered to be contributing economically, so you can be sure that the actual effect of the path network on the local economy is higher. This avoids overstating 'multiplier effects' of paths. However, beyond the raw calculation of how much money is brought in by tourists, there is much to be said for the potential for path networks to add to the attractiveness of an area for tourism.

In a study of 4 local path networks undertaken by the Sport Industry Research Centre (referred to as the SIRC study from here onwards), the average spend per eligible respondent varied from £42.20 in Edinburgh to £24.11 at Abriachan (near Drumnadrochit).

About the toolkit

This toolkit has been designed and written by Walking-the-Talk based on research and initial development by the Sport Industry Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University.