

COLINTRAIVE AND GLENDARUEL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

The Cowal Way

1. Summary

This report outlines the case for the Cowal Way to be recognised as a valuable A&B asset which now needs to be managed and maintained as such. It sets out the case for the retention and upgrading of the Way and asks for Council assistance both financially and in kind.

2. Recommendation

That the committee:

- a) recognises the Cowal Way as a major tourism asset.
- b) accepts that the Cowal Way should be included in the A&B Core Paths Network in its entirety.
- c) agrees that a management structure should be put in place to oversee the future of the Way.
- d) accepts that financial assistance for the management and maintenance of the Way will be required and that any such funding request should be included in the A&B budget considerations. For 2009 this will amount to an initial figure of £48000 with an annual figure thereafter of £10000.

3. Background

The Cowal Way is a long distance footpath which runs from Portavadie in the southwest of the peninsula, to Inveruglas on Loch Lomond. It was established initially as a Millennium project by Colintraive and Glendaruel Community Council (Colglen). As a deliberate policy the Way was routed entirely on:

Public highway (35% - 32km)
Forestry Commission road and hill path (60% - 55km)
Public footpath (5% -4.5km).

Since its inception it has been managed by a small steering group of Colglen volunteers. Initial funding was received via the Lottery Fund and this enabled the steering group to finance signing, waymarking and some path maintenance. A Cowal Way guide was produced in map and book form and the original 5000 copies have all been sold.

Proceeds from the sales have enabled further maintenance to be carried out and to part finance a new guidebook.

The Way has existed for eight years, is well established and now appears on Ordnance Survey maps as a named long distance footpath.

4. Communities and Economy

The Cowal Way is now an important link in Scotland's major long distance footpaths. It Links the Kintyre Way from Tarbert on Loch Fyne to The West Highland Way on Loch Lomond. In doing so it also links the Cowal communities of:

Portavadie
Millhouse
Kames/Tighnabruaich
Glendaruel
Glenbranter/Strachur
Lochgoilhead
Ardgartan/ Arrochar

In each of these communities 5-10 existing businesses have benefited from the Way. These cover all facets of the tourism industry from accommodation and catering to transport, retail and visitor centres. Visit Scotland aims to position Scotland as a major walking destination and walking tourism is expected to increase dramatically. Already one company is arranging at least 50 guided Cowal Way walks a year. The potential for growth is excellent.

5. Marketing, Management and Maintenance

For the potential of the Cowal Way to be realised, three issues need to be addressed.

Marketing

The current steering group has undertaken to relaunch the marketing of the Way.

A new guidebook is to be published incorporating updates and minor amendments to the route. A new publisher has been contracted with a wider distribution and marketing network including North America and Europe.

Cowalfest are to include the Way in all their future promotions. The annual Cowal Way Day in Glendaruel will be reestablished. A new dedicated web site is to be established with appropriate links. Funding is already in place for all of this and any future reprints of the guide book will be at the expense of the publisher.

Management

The whole route is in Argyll. Every section is within the areas covered by the Core Path Network of either A&BC or the National Park. Other interested bodies include Forestry Commission, A&IE and Visit Scotland. None of the Community Councils linked by the Way has the funding or wherewithal to manage the route.

The steering group feels that the Way has reached a level of success such that the whole route should now become the responsibility of a higher body.

Maintenance

Maintenance of the route has to be considered under the headings of the three types of ownership:

public highway ,

forestry road and hill path

public footpath/right of way.

Of these, A&BC are responsible for the first through Operational Services and no real difficulties are envisaged. The FC has provided an excellent support service throughout the period for all their responsibilities and have upgraded and improved wherever necessary. Public footpaths are however a cause for concern. By definition they are rights of way over any land and though open to the public they are rarely maintained. The popularity of the Way is now causing a problem on these sections, with increased use resulting in erosion and bog. Even short sections can be off putting. Whilst landowners and managers can be encouraged to help, the underlying difficulty is finance. Only 5% of the Way is in this category and of this only small sections are affected, often only 10-20metres at a time.

6. Requirement/costs

Managers of other long distance footpaths estimate a cost of £30 to £50 per metre to upgrade bad sections. The extent of the problem on the Cowal Way is such that a total of only about 500 metres on open land needs to be done, at the lower of these prices, with about 600 metres over more difficult woodland, at the higher cost .These translate in to costs of about £15000 and £30000 respectively. With renewal for signage and waymarking at £3000 a total of £48000 would enable a remarkable improvement in the Walk experience to be achieved.

An annual figure of £10000 would enable the standard to be maintained and allow for future improvements.

7. Conclusion

The Cowal Way cannot continue to be administered in its present guise. In order to cope with its current success and to maximize its potential, it needs to be managed and maintained to a national standard. For this to happen, expertise and financial support are required urgently.