

## **ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

A Meeting of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group of Ards and North Down Borough Council was held in Church Street, Newtownards, on Monday 30 September 2024 at 6:00 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillor Ray McKimm (Chairman)  
Alderman Alan Graham  
Alderman Martin McRandal  
Councillor Christine Creighton  
Councillor Alex Harbinson  
Councillor Stephen Hollywood  
Councillor Wesley Irvine  
Councillor Carl McClean  
Councillor Gillian McCollum  
Councillor Barry McKee  
Ms Marianne Kennerley (Boom Inc! / Boom Studios)  
Ms Alison McQueen (For Another Path)  
Mr James Hunter (Greenspaces Bangor)  
Mr David Lennon (Friends of Columbanus, Bangor)  
Mr Stephen McCrory (Ards and North Down Cycle Campaign Group)

**Officers:** Director of Community and Wellbeing (G Bannister), Head of Parks & Cemeteries (S Daye), Head of Communications and Marketing (C Jackson) and Democratic Services Officer (R King)

### **1. APOLOGIES & INTRODUCTIONS**

Apologies were received from Councillor McCracken, Councillor Creighton, Councillor Irwin and Councillor Cochrane.

**NOTED.**

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest notified.

**NOTED.**

### **3. MINUTES OF NORTH DOWN COASTAL PATH WORKING GROUP MEETING DATED 17 JULY 2024**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Minutes of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group meeting dated 17 July 2024.

**AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Hollywood, seconded by Councillor McKee, that the minutes be adopted.**

#### **4. SURVEY REPORT AND PRESENTATION**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailed as follows:

##### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

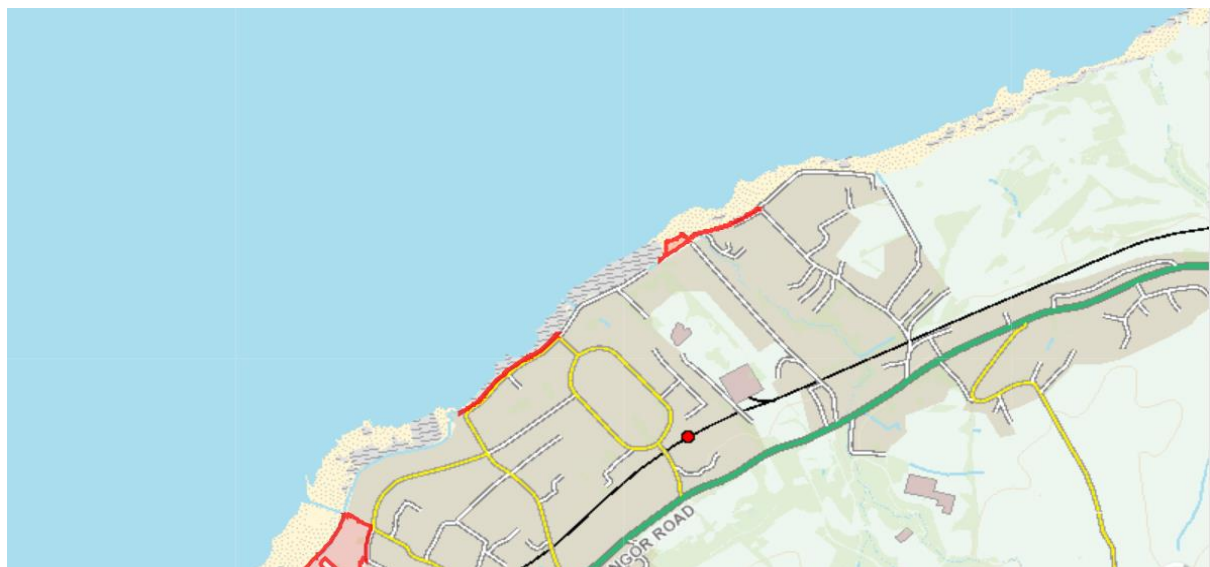
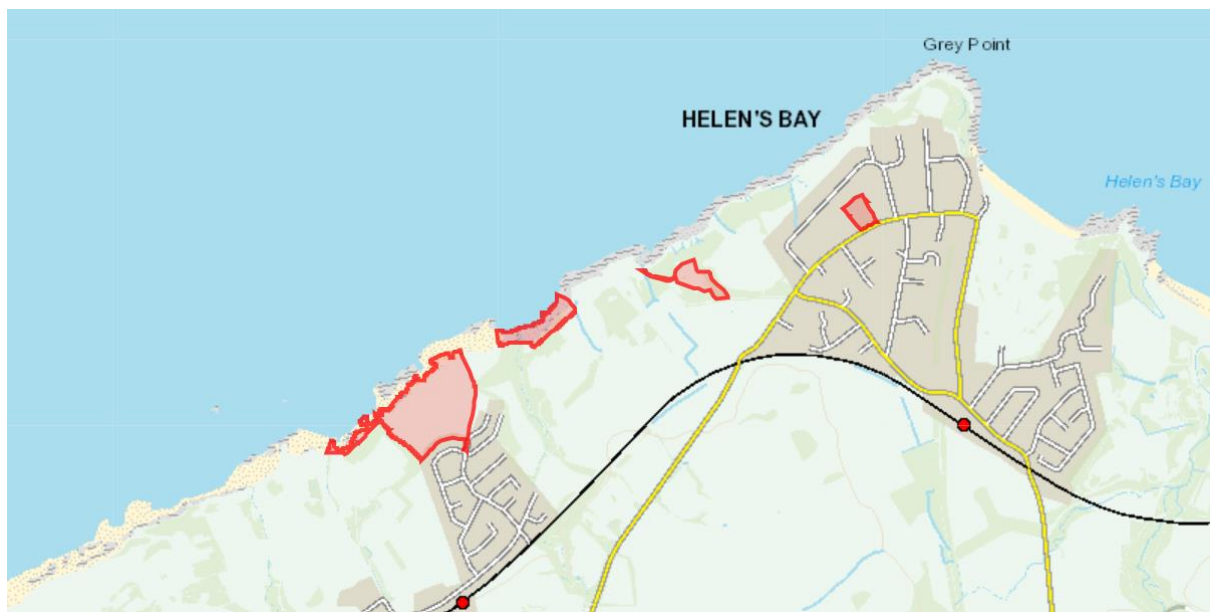
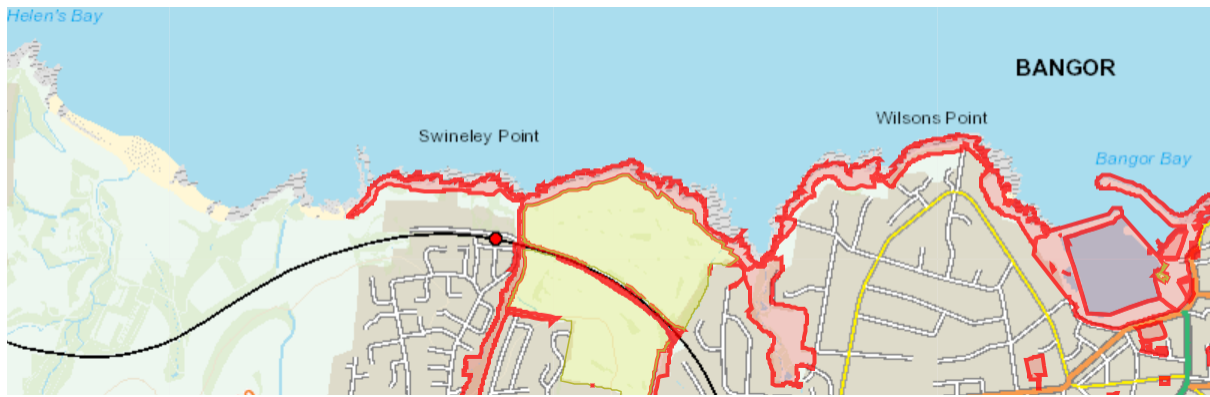
The historical background to the proposed upgrades to the North Down Coastal Path began in 2016 when the Department for Infrastructure published 'A Strategic Plan for Greenways'. Council was developing plans to create a greenway along the path in line with the Strategy until the decision was taken by Members in January 2023 to remove the Greenway project from the North Down Coastal Path and withdraw the planning application which had been submitted.

As part of that decision not to proceed with the planning application and the greenway project (specific to the North Down Coastal Path) Members requested that a Working Group be established to involve Social Partners and Expert Guests. Those represented could include a diverse range of interests in areas such as cycling, walking, environmental and outdoor recreation groups and be made up of people of all backgrounds and ages. It was proposed that the position of Social Partners would be advertised requesting applications from interested parties with up to ten groups being represented. Only one Member would attend from each of those groups to represent its interests.

The Terms of Reference for this Working Group was agreed by Members in September 2023 and the group had now been established with representation from various groups and organisations including For Another Path, Friends of Columbanus, Greenspaces Group, AND Cycle Campaign Group, Bangor Chamber of Commerce Group and Boom Studios Group plus 3 x Town Advisory Groups.

##### **2.0 LAND OWNERSHIP**

It was explained that along the length of the North Down Coastal Path there were 115 plots of land in total of which 78 were registered. The owners included: Ards and North Down Borough Council, Northern Ireland Water, Department for Infrastructure, Ministry of Defence, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Department for Communities, Crown Estate, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and other private landowners some of which were unknown. The land outlined and shaded in red below was that in Council ownership, the images ran from Bangor to Hollywood.





It was highlighted by Members that the issues pertaining to the greenway project included the following:

- Insufficient Revenue Budgets
- Need for better sustained engagement
- Difference between Consultation and Engagement
- Larger survey of users required
- Dedicated Officer for all path networks
- Building a network of support and community champions
- 'One Path Initiative' Workshops / Awareness
- Planning application was too large and complicated
- Need for Non-Technical drawings

Benefits of a well-maintained path resource included:

- Connecting communities
- Providing safe, traffic-free routes
- Safe and easy access to fresh air and exercise
- More people able to journey by foot or bicycle
- Promoting physical/mental health and well-being
- Supporting climate change adoption plans
- Can improve quality of life for everyone
- Can create business opportunities
- Can increase property values

Members at the North Down Coastal Path Working Group in July 2024 agreed a way forward regarding the £150,000 per annum budget, the delivery areas breakdown was as below:

- £80,000 (Path Repairs and Surveys)
- £45,000 (Machinery Maintenance)
- £25,000 (Signage, Promotion and Engagement)

Discussion around the 2025/6 budget would be progressed at the Working Group meeting in September (30<sup>th</sup>) to allow time for the budget setting process in October.

### **3.0 PATH REPAIRS AND SURVEYS**

Many sections of the path needed improvement and repair. Some were minor in nature and others required significant intervention to provide a solution to ensure continued and improved access. In most instances Habitats Regulation Assessment Assent would need to be completed and for most of the rest, planning permission was likely to be required. It would be necessary to submit multiple separate planning applications to address each section that required intervention. Each planning application would require the necessary surveys to accompany them where appropriate such as, but not limited to:

- Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA)
- Flora/Habitat Surveys
- Tree Surveys
- Invasive Species Surveys
- Badger Surveys
- Otter Surveys
- Bat preliminary roost assessment Surveys/full bat surveys
- Wintering Bird Surveys
- Fisheries and Aquatic Surveys
- Archaeological surveys
- Geology Surveys
- Topographical Surveys
- Contamination Surveys
- Ground Surveys (stability)
- Flood Risk Assessments
- Drainage Assessments

Each planning application would require the necessary drawings to accompany the application, as well as the required planning fees. Multidisciplinary Consultancy support would be required to advise on what interventions were deemed necessary or possible, to compile the planning applications and undertake the necessary

surveys etc. Therefore, due to budget constraints it was envisaged that potentially only one planning application could be submitted per year and no works could be carried out until a planning decision had been reached, which could take considerable time to achieve. Additional drawings and surveys may be required as part of the planning process if the Statutory Consultees required further information or propose mitigation measures etc. It was also likely that there would be planning conditions attached to the planning decisions that would require to be discharged before any works could take place, such as Construction Environmental Management Plans etc. Multidisciplinary Consultancy support would be required throughout the construction delivery process. It was proposed that due to the number of planning applications that were likely to be required and the number of surveys required, that Council utilised the consultants already procured under the Framework List and also when it came to the construction stages that the already procured contractors are deployed to complete the works (or use their already appointed specialised subcontractors), this would negate the need for multiple and lengthy procurement procedures for the multiple planning applications, surveys and construction works that would be required and allow for efficient delivery of the improvements.

As outlined above in terms of land ownership, if the land was not currently owned by Council, then negotiations and approvals would be required from the respective landowners to submit the planning applications and then carry out the works necessary if approved.

Outlined below was a list of places that could be focused on for improvement initially, this would be periodically reviewed as progress was made.

### **3.1 Smelt Bay**



Temporary barriers at the bottom of the path leading down from Downshire Road





Existing galvanised railings

The temporary fencing could be replaced with galvanised railings, which were in place just to the left of this section. It would provide the necessary barrier to protect people from the drop down beyond and allow for easier maintenance. It was not envisaged that this would require planning permission, but a Habitat Regular Assessment Assent (HRA) may be required. This land was in Council ownership. The rest of the section of this path required maintenance see below in the next section (Machinery and Maintenance)

### **3.2 Swinely Bay**

On the eastern approach to Swinely Bay the tarmac surfacing finished and became gravel and then led down towards a concrete section of path just before the beach at Swinley Bay. The gravel section was owned by Council up to where it became concrete. Potentially this gravel section could be surfaced in tarmac making it more accessible. This was likely to require planning permission or HRA Assent.



Approach from the east looking towards Swinley Bay

Across Swinley Bay there was no path other than a desire line that ran along the vegetation towards the rear of the beach. There was the potential to improve accessibility and connectivity for all users in this section by installing a path. This would require planning permission and landowner approval (the land was privately owned).





Looking west across Swinely Bay/beach

### **3.3 Crawfordsburn Beach**

The land around Crawfordsburn Beach was owned by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). On the western edge of the beach the path was narrow, steep and not surfaced. Potentially discussions could have been had with DAERA to improve this by potentially installing a boardwalk to increase the accessibility of this section of the path. Nonslip boards could be used due to the gradient. It was likely that this may require planning permission.



Eastern side of Crawfordsburn Beach

### 3.4 Grey Point Fort

The picture below showed a section of path running from Grey Point Road towards Grey Point Fort approaching from the eastern side.

Where it led down from the road and on towards the Fort it was very steep and narrow.



Towards Grey Point Fort on the Eastern side

This land was owned by the DAERA. Works in this area would require planning permission.

Just past the Fort on the western side the verges of the gravel path had significantly encroached and narrowed the path. Potentially discussions could be entered into with DAERA to see if they could improve these sections of the path. It was likely that HRA Assent may be required for such works.



Beyond Grey Point Fort on the Western side

### **3.5 NI Water Wastewater Treatment Works**

On the eastern approach to the NI Water Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) accessed from Rhanbuoy Park, Seahill, the path was steep, overgrown and narrow.





Eastern approach to the NI Water WWTW



Further towards the NI WWTW towards the door in the wall



Other side of the door

Works could have been undertaken to improve this section of path and make it more accessible. These were likely to require planning permission.





Further to the west of the door

The path along this section could be improved to widen the path to make it more passable and accessible.



Further along across the frontage of the WWTW

The vegetation on the left-hand side could have been removed back to the wall and the gravel topped up to reinstate the path to its original width.

Discussions could be entered into with NI Water to see what improvements could be carried out. It was likely that these improvements may have required planning permission.

### **3.6 Rockport School**

There was a section along Rockport school owned by the council and there was no path at present, only a desire line across a grassed area. This could be improved by installing either a gravel path or boardwalk to connect to the tarmac path on the western side and the gravel path on the eastern side. This may have required planning permission and HRA Assent.



Eastern approach towards Rockport School



### 3.7 Royal Belfast Golf Club



Eastern approach to Royal Belfast Golf Club



Directly in front of Royal Belfast Golf Club, Club House

This section of path had narrowed due to vegetation build up along the wall running along the left hand side. If the vegetation was removed it would reinstate the path back to its original width. HRA Assent was likely to be required for this type of work.



Towards the western side of the golf course approaching Station Road



Same section showing damage to the rock armour and the path being undermined.

This section of path needed repaired as it was being undermined by the sea and the rock armour has moved, it is at risk of collapsing. This would require planning permission.

RECOMMENDED that the above works be progressed and worked up as a priority.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries summarised the above report to members through a series of slides and the following points were raised throughout each section of the presentation:

### **3.1 Smelt Bay**

Ms McQueen (For Another Path) felt that the temporary barrier installed by NI Water should be replaced with planting rather than a permanent handrail as there was no safety risk. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries would look into that option but advised of a complex process with HRA approval necessary.

### **3.2 Swinley Bay**

Mr Hunter (Greenspaces Bangor) asked for clarity on land ownership at Swinley Bay and the Director of Community and Wellbeing explained that only the gravel section on the eastern approach of the footpath was owned by the Council. The Director clarified in response to a further query from Mr Lennon (Friends of Columbanus, Bangor) that the concrete section of the path was unlikely to have been installed by Council and there was no obligation for the Council to maintain it.

Referring to the previous plans for the Greenway, Mr Lennon recalled that a section of path was nine metres in size and that had not included the additional size of the necessary underpinning which he felt would have completely destroyed Swinley Bay. The Director added that it was important to remember those details so there were no

mistakes made in the future. He clarified that most of the land at Swinley Bay was in private ownership.

Councillor McKee queried the extent of the accessibility benefits that the Council was trying to achieve by resurfacing the path on what was a relatively safe incline. He felt that other sections of the path were more extreme and more of a priority. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries explained that this and the other sections identified for improvement works were deemed to be most realistic given Council only owned a small percentage of land on the coastal path. He explained the challenges of Local Government procurement legislation which prevented Council investing financially in privately owned land.

In terms of the gradient, the Chair, as a wheelchair user, felt that unless the Council was able to develop within the guidelines to a maximum incline of 1:12 there was no point as it would not be accessible.

Councillor McClean queried the criteria for ranking the top seven and if it was a preference to build on Council owned land. He also wondered if there was a duty of care for other landowners to maintain their sections of the coastal path to good standards. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that there was a duty of care by other landowners but explained the complexities of improving areas that were privately owned and how that land would need to be procured by Council for it to do anything. He explained that officers hoped to engage with the private landowners and steer them towards available funding streams.

Ms McQueen wondered if there was opportunity to propose other areas outside of the options presented in the report and the Officer explained that the report was just to start an open discussion and the Chair added that the idea was for everyone to contribute.

### **3.3 Crawfordsburn Beach**

Alderman McRandal recognised that the stretch at Crawfordsburn Beach was under DAERA ownership and wondered what the Council could do in terms of development and the officer explained that the intention was to engage with DAERA and work up some proposals.

Mr Lennon understood that DAERA was moving away from investment in permanent structures and was concerned there may be reluctance from the Department here. The officer explained that DAERA did permit planning applications along that path so there were different views though he was unable to comment on DAERA's own spending policy, but in any event it was clear that the boardwalks were coming to the end of their lifespan after 30 years.

### **3.4 Grey Point Fort**

Ms McQueen felt that the word 'improve' was subjective and therefore she was wary about what the suggested improvements would mean for what was a particularly beautiful stretch of the coastal path which she would hate to see tarmacked. Her



concerns had arisen from the previous Greenway plans which she felt would have been a disaster for the area.

The officer emphasised that the report and its content was only to start a discussion at this stage and would only involve doing some basic survey work and costings to bring back options to the Working Group. Before committing tens of thousands of pounds to the work, it was important to get things right and only carry out work that the Working Group was interested in completing. The Chair provided some further reassurance of that process.

Returning to accessibility, Councillor McKee believed that without monumental change, this section of the path could not be improved for disability access but he was aware that there was a very accessible alternative route that circumvented what was a steep incline in this section. He felt that signage could be used here to advise people of the gradient and the alternative route that could be used to avoid it. He hoped officers would keep that in mind and the officer felt that this was an important consideration. He pointed to an example at Cairn Wood that took this approach which could also be applied here.

From a cycling perspective, Mr McCrory highlighted that the stretch of the path was also unsuitable for commuting and he felt that sign posting could be an option to advise cyclist commuters of an alternative more direct route. He felt that this would also help manage the interaction between cyclists and pedestrians in that area.

The Chair appreciated the benefits of having good signage for different types of users but was also mindful of over populating areas with signs. The officer returned to the signage used at Cairn Wood and explained how that had been developed to be subtle. He also pointed to more modern approaches through the use of mobile phone apps for example.

### **3.5 NI Water Wastewater Treatment Works**

Councillor McKee felt this was widely viewed as an area in need of attention but he was wary of environmental concerns due to significant mammal activity at that location. This had been an issue raised in the process that had led to this Working Group being established and the officer recognised the strong feelings in relation to that particular area and given the potential for environmental impacts, felt that it was important to recognise that there were some areas of the coastal path that just could not be made accessible to some people.

### **3.6 Rockport School**

The Chair asked for clarity on the proposals for this section and if it would involve tarmacked paths. The officer advised that the proposal was to make the area more accessible by joining what were known as desire lines to existing tarmac paths.

### **3.7 Royal Belfast Golf Club**

Referring to a section near Royal Belfast Golf Club, Mr Hunter raised concerns about the condition of the path in this area and asked how much of a priority it was. The

Officer explained the huge cost involved in carrying out any improvement works in that area and that it was the roughest part of the coastal path and extremely narrow and impassable in places.

Ms McQueen was aware that Royal Belfast Golf Club was due to undergo works involving some of its land and encouraged officers to have a discussion with the club about those plans.

Alderman McRandal referred to long running sink hole issues at Station Road, Craigavad, but was aware this was privately owned land and questioned whether this would prevent any improvement work being carried out. The officer explained that unless Council purchased the land or acquired a long-term lease it would be unable to invest in the area. Alderman McRandal understood that residents were happy to get the road resurfaced and maintain it but there were bigger longer-term concerns about the gaps in the sea wall and erosion from the sea which was sucking out the contents underneath the road. He wondered if the Council could do anything in terms of acquiring funding for the area from alternative sources as opposed to Council funding it.

The Director advised that the Council had met with residents over the recent months to discuss how it could support them, however paying for the work was not an option. He explained the difficulties and the need to find a balanced solution, recognising that it was a public path that needed to be safe but it also provided vehicular access to residents and that was the main cause of the surface erosion. This was a long-term matter however and he felt that there were less complex 'quick wins' that could be achieved first.

The Director suggested that the Working Group could establish a list of all sections that were at risk of erosion. While some matters would take considerable time before work could be actioned at least those areas would be identified and recorded.

Alderman McRandal felt that it was important to assist landowners in the mitigation of any areas that posed a risk of subsidence.

Returning to Station Road, Alderman Graham recognised that this had been a problem for many years and appreciated the difficulty that residents had in terms of gaining relevant land approvals from various public authorities and he felt that Council should undertake to establish what the challenges were for those residents.

Mr Hunter warned that addressing localised issues often only moved the wider age-old problem of coastal erosion to other locations and warned that it needed to be tackled on a bigger scale, beyond the remit of the Working Group.

Ms McQueen raised a flooding issue at Skippingstone Beach where there was a constant water running from the bin down to the wall. This froze over in the winter and was a safety risk which she asked if it could be addressed. The officer explained that it was raised at a previous meeting and his team were dealing with this.

The Chair thanked the officer for the presentation and asked how Working Group members could add further locations to the list as discussed. It was explained that

these could be brought under Any Other Notified Business before 5pm on the last working day before the day of meeting.

Referring to the information boards, Mr Lennon welcomed that the condition of this signage would be addressed given it was an integral part of the Columban Way.

Proposed by Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be adopted.

Ms McQueen felt that the recommendation did not fully reflect the discussion and suggested that it include the options for members to add the suggested projects to a list for consideration.

The proposer and seconder were content for that to be included.

**AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the above works be progressed and worked up as a priority, that the other works suggested be recorded in a list of suggested projects, and the list would remain open for additional suggestions from the group.**

## **5. BUDGET & BUSINESS CASES 2025/6 DISCUSSION**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing outlined as follows:

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Following agreement in July 2024 regarding the allocation of £150,000 for the 2024/25 financial year, several work streams were being progressed.

### **2.0 MACHINERY AND MAINTENANCE**

Of the sections that the Council owned, in most part close to Bangor, there had been minimal maintenance on that section with periodic cutting of the verges. Officers walked the path in from Bangor to Holywood on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2024 and it was evident that further maintenance was required in the sections close to Bangor. In places there was up to 50cm of tarmac path along the verges that was currently under encroaching vegetation. It was felt beneficial that this encroachment was removed over the winter months to restore the path to its original width.

Other sections of the path had vegetation overhanging at a height that would require cutting back to keep the path corridor clear and ensure that people could pass safely without brambles and tree branches at head height etc.

Officers were processing the procurement of a hot foam application machine and mechanical sweepers to ensure the build-up of debris and subsequent encroachment of vegetation did not occur again. The hot foam machine would control vegetation along the edge of the path without the need to use herbicide. This type of verge maintenance was standard along the Comber Greenway for example, which for the most part, was undertaken by volunteers and a similar voluntary task

force could be established along this section of the path. Further procurement was being progressed to purchase enhanced cutting equipment to ensure maintenance was completed accurately, efficiently and complimentary to the surrounding landscape.

In the first picture below, you could see a kerb line with vegetation build up along the front. Others showed where the vegetation had encroached onto the sides of the path narrowing it. The verges were being cut periodically, but if removed back to the edge of the tarmac path underneath, it would restore the path to its original width.



Along Carnalea Golf Course



Further along the seaside edge of Carnalea Golf Course



Towards Killaire Road

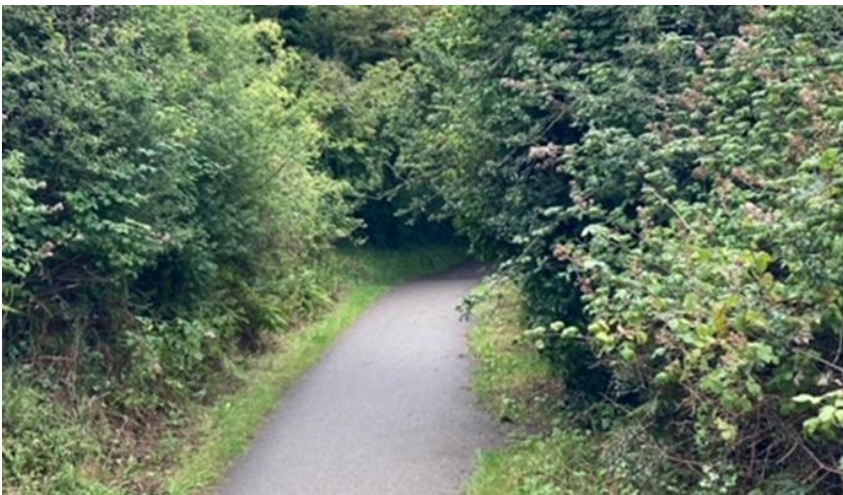


In parallel with Killaire Road





Further along in parallel with Killaire Road



Towards the western end of Killaire Road

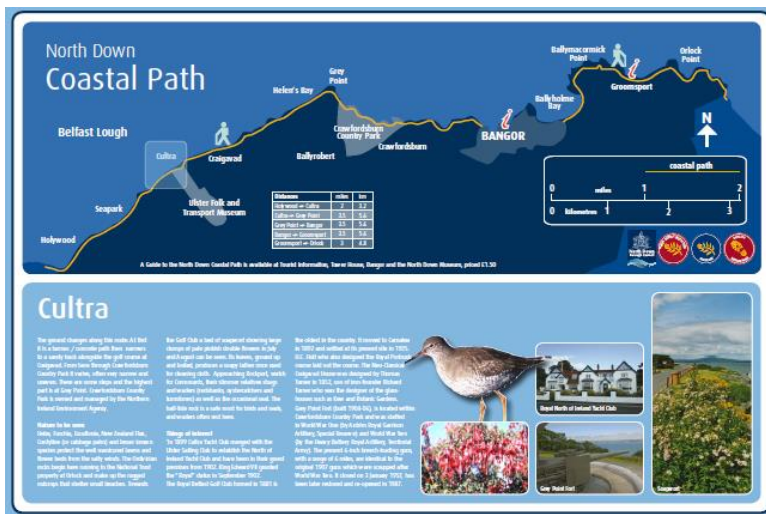
### **3.0 SIGNAGE, PROMOTION AND ENGAGEMENT**

During the Officer visit on 9th August 2024, it was evident that much of the current signage needed to be repaired, updated and/or replaced.

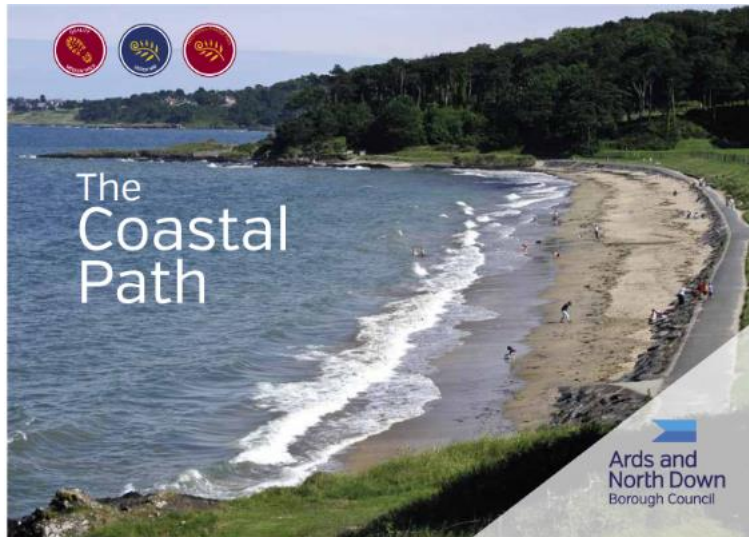
Historically there were several information signs along the North Down Coastal Path, but those had deteriorated over the years such as the one at Cultra below, or they had been removed completely.



It was planned to update the content if necessary and reinstall those signs in the 6 original locations, Seapark, Cultra, Greypoint, Ballymacormick Point and Orlock Point. The image below demonstrated what they originally looked like.



There was also a leaflet related to the North Down Coastal Path which required updating. This leaflet was periodically reprinted and distributed by the Council Tourism Team to outlets such as the Visitor Information Centres, Crawfordsburn Country Park and the Airports etc. It was planned to update the content and continue to distribute it for information.



#### 4.0 CELEBRATING THE PATH

With the new Development Officer (Community Trails and Greenways) in place, a programme of activities along the coastal path was being developed to promote its use. The Officers would also be involved in some of these activities and events that would celebrate the recreation, biodiversity and heritage of this important location.

The above Officer would reach out to various user types such as dog walkers, walkers, cyclists, parents and users with mobility needs, to gauge their requirements and while undertaking the activities, also start to promote the ethos of a shared use path, so that all user groups respected others and be mindful of each other's needs and vulnerabilities. The approach could be codesigned with the Working Group.

The Outdoor Recreation and the North Down Working Group sections of the AND website should also be updated and more content added to make people aware of the progress being made and to promote engagement and respectful use etc, this could also link to the Citizen Space resource, which would allow people to engage easily. Some signage along the path with a QR Code linking back to the website/Citizen Space could be erected, so that users could easily engage with Council

Given the length of the Coastal Path and the challenge to access some areas, video footage was being developed to clearly show the route. This would allow the Working Group to discuss matter in greater detail and aid with future promotion of the path.

Officers were also progressing an Oral History Project of North Down Coastal Path. Oral history was the recording and archiving of people's memories, feelings and attitudes. Everyone, irrespective of their background, had a unique story to tell. Oral history allowed people whose voices might not otherwise be heard to share their experiences. The act of retelling life events could help people understand their lives and often contribute to a sense of wellbeing and identity both for individuals and

communities. At their most powerful, oral histories could explain, enrich understanding and encourage empathy with others. It could play a crucial role in expanding the historic record of the path and go some way to bring local peoples differing views into a shared perspective.

In Spring of 2025 Parks Officers would be hosting a Bio-Blitz at various locations along the coastal path. A Bio-Blitz was an activity at which the public were encouraged to participate in a number of workshops, some tailored for adults and others for families. Workshops include, but were not limited to, moth trapping and identification, bird identification, minibeast/bug hunts, tree identification, pollinator and FIT counts, plant and bryophyte identification and pond dipping. The activities formed part of the public engagement for the coastal path but were equally designed to gain as much biodiversity information as possible, which could significantly improve knowledge of the site and the range of species that inhabit the area.

RECOMMENDED that the content of this report is noted.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries summarised the report to the Working Group and the following discussion ensued, as summarised below.

#### Machinery and Maintenance

Mr Hunter sought clarity around the use of hot foam in terms of weed / vegetation control and wondered if human resource, such as volunteers and residents' groups, would offer a gentler approach. The officer explained that volunteers would be a key part of the maintenance programme, particularly in terms of privately owned land where the Council was not able to maintain it directly. He provided assurances that the hot foam machine that the Council intended to procure used a water-based method and was chemical free. It used boiling water which was whipped up into a foam and once applied it disappeared in a matter of seconds. It could only be used in certain locations however and could not be used on gravel areas as it required a solid surface to operate on. This process was used widely in Europe where there was a glycerine ban and it proved to be an equally effective alternative.

#### Signage, Promotion and Engagement

Councillor McCollum referred to the information sign at Cultra which was pictured in the report and wondered how long it had been there, believing that it had appeared to deteriorate extremely quickly. The officer believed that it had been printed on plastic but it would likely be upgraded with metal which would be more durable.

Councillor McKee noted that DAERA had installed excellent signage on its own section of the coastal path at Crawfordsburn Country Park and it showed what land was owned by DAERA and included points of useful information. He felt that the Council could replicate that approach on its own land.



Mr Lennon felt that it would be useful to replace the signs at regular intervals to prevent them getting in their current state and suggested having a metal or bronze sign to emphasise the significance of St Columbanus.

The Chair asked if the Council would be simply renewing the signage it had before or looking to redesign and the officer explained that his team would be working with Corporate Communications colleagues to look at more creative options. The Head of Communications and Marketing added that the Council had a tender in place for signage which presented various options but she advised that there were mixed feelings in terms of signage with some people appreciating lots of it while others did not want to see a clutter of signage. She felt that it would be more beneficial to start from scratch and look at the entire coastal path rather than addressing bits and pieces. It was about striking the right balance and having a sympathetic, informative and engaging approach for all types of path users.

Mr Hunter asked if the Working Group could be updated on this as he would like to feed back to his own group while Councillor Harbinson described signage as a dark horse in this process and felt that it was an opportunity to take a more strategic approach and link up the coastal path in terms of mobility, history and the natural environment etc and provide some continuity along the path.

Clarifying to the Chair, the Head of Parks and Cemeteries explained that it was the intention to install some signage before the end of the current financial year and the Head of Communications and Marketing recognised that there was a larger piece of work to do in the longer term that could not be addressed in the existing year but any new signage this year would consider the bigger picture. She explained that there were further considerations relating to the Council's Tourism policy.

Ms Kennerley (Boom Studios) referred to the Smart technologies element which was an important tool, particularly for the city centre from an accessibility point of view. She also felt that street art was important in the city centre and that could be expanded along the coastal path where appropriate in order to create some narrative whilst also tackling some of the antisocial behaviour issues around graffiti.

Ms McQueen wondered if it would be possible to incorporate accessibility in to the signage plans and be able to state for example, that the path was accessible from Banks Lane to Pickie, though she was aware of accessibility extending much further than that. As a general point, she also noted that the area from Banks Lane to Bangor centre was not included in the reports.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries explained that it was intended to approach the coastal route by creating various levels of accessibility as had been done successfully at Cairn Wood. He added that the survey work to date had not identified anywhere between Banks Lane and the city centre, but that was not to stop anyone wishing to bring a new location in that section, as discussed in the previous item.



Councillor McClean felt that it was not a priority at this stage to install new signage and it would be more useful to take a strategic approach rather than risk creating tat and clutter. Unless there was any urgent signage required for health and safety matters, he would rather hold off and allow more time to be spent developing a longer-term plan.

The officer clarified that this proposal was only to replace signage in poor condition that needed replacing temporarily until a new strategy was developed. His concern was that poor quality, unreadable signage created an unkempt appearance and that always posed an antisocial behaviour risk. He warned that the longer-term strategy was much further down the line possibly even beyond the next financial year.

Councillor McClean was content with that approach but appreciated there was a strategic approach required, perhaps in respect of branding and creating an identity, to encourage tourists arriving at Belfast City Airport to head eastwards. He emphasised that this approach did not mean clutter or a ton of signage.

The Director gave apologies for the remainder of the meeting due to having another engagement.

(The Director left the meeting – 7.20pm)

Ms Kennerley wondered if instead of replacing signs if it would be better to simply remove them to create a cleaner look, with a view that there would be a longer-term approach and the officer explained that it would be a case of both, some signage would simply need to be removed completely while other signage did need to be replaced.

Councillor McCollum referred to a meeting at Donaghadee Wayfinding and Signage Working Group where it was agreed to tackle an issue of signage clutter in the town by conducting a walking audit of signage there. It would involve walking throughout the town. She suggested it could be an option for this group and wondered if it would be worth breaking it down into smaller areas.

It was four to five hours to cover the path so the officer felt it was sensible to break up the audit into smaller areas and it had always been the intention to have subgroups within the Working Group that would cover specific areas of the coastal path.

Mr Lennon agreed that an audit was necessary, believing that while there were some quick fixes required in terms of Columbanus related signage, it was important to have a strategy with quality branded signage that was durable and lasting.

Councillor McCollum recalled a recent visit to the Wild Atlantic Way and noted that wildlife boards were placed at strategic locations and those provided some direction and education that could perhaps be used on the North Down coastal path.

Members discussed how an audit could work and it was agreed that it could be split in to three areas – Groomsport, Bangor and Hollywood with representation for all of the group's interests. Dates would be organised for this.

Mr Hunter queried the reliability of the data gained from Citizen Space and the Head of Communications and Marketing explained that it did require people to sign up to use the application so did require a good level of thought in their feedback. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries added that it had been extremely useful for projects at Ward Park.

Alderman McRandal proposed, seconded by Councillor Harbinson, to note the officer's report.

NOTED.

## **6. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS**

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

## **7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

6<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

## **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting terminated at 7.37pm.