

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 30th June 2025 at 6:00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Brady (Chairman, as nominated in first item of business)
Alderman Graham
Councillor Holywood
Councillor Irwin
Councillor McKee
James Hunter (Greenspaces)
Marianne Kennerley (Boom Incl/ Boom Studios)
Stephen McCrory (Ards and North Down Cycle Campaign Group)
Alison McQueen (For Another Path)
Mr Frank Shivers (Bangor Chamber of Commerce)

Officers: Head of Administration (A Curtis), Park & Cemeteries Development Manager (J Bettes) and Democratic Services Officer (S McCrea)

The meeting commenced at 18:02. As there was no current chair of the working group, the Head of Administration advised that she would act as Chair for the meeting until such times as the working group selected a new Chair.

1. APOLOGIES

None received

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest notified.

NOTED.

3. ELECTION OF WORKING GROUP CHAIRPERSON

Proposed by Councillor Holywood, seconded by Councillor McKee that Councillor Brady be installed as the new Chair of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group

NOTED.

4. MINUTES OF NORTH DOWN COASTAL PATH WORKING GROUP MEETING DATED 31ST MARCH 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Minutes of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group meeting dated 31st March 2025

Alison McQueen advised of a correction in the previous minutes within Any Other Notified Business where 'Ballymacormick Point' had been referenced when it should have read 'Orlock Point'.

NOTED.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

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

Proposed by Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Hollywood that the minutes be noted.

6. UPDATE REPORT AND PRESENTATION

The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager spoke on aspects of the report and gave a presentation highlighting some areas.

He advised that barriers were being replaced and vegetation would be cut back during the autumn time. The finance and budget allocated to 2024/25 would also be in effect for 2025/26. Remote controlled lawnmowers had been purchased which were recognised as being more environmentally friendly. Meanwhile, mobile urban sweeping vehicle had been delivered and were utilised between the coastal path and also at ward park.

With regard to the planning package, most surveys that were required had been completed. Alison McQueen recalled how the approach to any path works were to be carried out with minimal interventions. In relation to clearing preparations, she had reservations regarding mass ground works required. The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager advised that there was a lot of work to be carried out, especially shoreside but that any preparation works would be reflected in the finished product and its durability.

The full route had been divided into 33 sections which were shown on the slide presentation. As an example, the stretch of path beside the golf course, abutted by a stone wall had vegetation overgrowth spreading from the wall's base onto the pathway. Its removal would increase the path width. With regard to the path finish, quarry dust had been used in some areas but officers were cognisant of the need for any investment to be long lasting. The problem with quarry dust was that it would eventually find its way beneath the mud whether that was due to adverse weather conditions or foot traffic. In addition, past experience had shown that in those areas

where quarry dust had been used, grass and weeds were quick to grow at the path verges, thus reducing the path width.

The slides showed imagery of proposed lines of tarmac to replace dirt paths, some of which were in fact elephant trails, where people create new pathways for shortcuts or scenery. In widening these pathways, it would allow for users to pass each other. Whilst Alison McQueen received confirmation that the old stone archway on the pathway would remain, the Park & Cemeteries Development Manager suggested that it may be wise to take members of the Working Group through each section in a separate meeting. Alison McQueen noted how some of the pathways looked like creeping greenways, advising that the move from this style of path to one that was asphalted had been an issue that people were against at the beginning when the original application was submitted. The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager clarified that to-scale drawings existed and that shoreside works would be as minimalist as possible. The pathway beside the golf club had been discussed some months ago where it had been confirmed that if no works were carried out, the pathway would eventually cease to be given its 1-1.5m undermining.

The effects of these works raised concern amongst the group with regard to trees and other vegetation that would have to be removed in the event of path widening. Despite that, Frank Shivers thought the pathway was an underutilised asset with less footfall in the winter months. With the path being widened, it may create more interest in using the pathway.

Alderman Graham asked the group if they believed the pathway would mostly be used by walkers and cyclists, for if that were to be the case then there would be some need to increase width in certain locations to allow users to pass one another. It was also important to remember that any works carried out had to be of a particular quality, as failing to do so would mean regular upkeep or repairs in the future. James Hunter agreed that there was need to widen the path in particular areas but was cognisant that the general public may feel it would set a precedent for the rest of the path. As such, it would be wise to ensure such concerns were assuaged with confirmation that no major landscape changes would occur and that the general character of the coastal path was maintained. Frank Shivers recalled the Comber Greenway and the positive footfall made by cyclists with local shops on Sundays.

With concern amongst the group regarding some of the sections, The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager advised that the decision could be postponed to give Officers the chance to discuss matters further with individual members of the group. It was noted that decisions will be required by/at the next meeting in order to meet the 2026/27 budget preparation deadline.

It was agreed that discussions with members of the group regarding the different pathway sections would be external to the tri-monthly working group meeting.

Frank Shivers referred to issue with signage and asked if the Council had permission to change signs and their location. The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager agreed to get back to him and clarify the matter.

The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager advised the group of recent and upcoming events and promotions such as:

- the bioblitz's that took place on the 13th May (Seapark to Bangor) and 30th May (Pickie Park to Brompton and Carnalea)
- the upcoming Heritage Walk one on 1st July (Groomsport to Bangor)
- the upcoming Summer Play in the Park at Seapark on the 6th August.
- the Brompton rewilding site would be cut at the end of the season.

Other updates included the Centre of Environmental Data and Recording (CEDAR) at the bioblitz and that Cycling Friendly Borough would continue to work with DfI on the Active Travel Strategy.

The Helens Bay headland route, just past the end of Crawfordsburn Beach in a Westerly direction had been a concern for some time regarding safe passage for users. There had been a plan to circumnavigate this one section of the coastal path by making an alternative route via Sheridan Drive. There had been some initial confusion as to land ownership of the pathway between Sheridan Drive and the coastal path which had now been established. It was partly owned by the Clandeboye Estate and DAERA with initial conversations being positive. If agreement was to be reached, there would have to be a local engagement exercise. In answer to Councillor McKee's queries on failing to reach agreement and alternative pathways, The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager agreed that there would be further investigations such as toward the railway cottages or Crawfordsburn Country Park.

NOTED

7. FUTURE MEMBERSHIP OF WORKING GROUP

All members of the group were content for membership to remain as it was for a further year.

NOTED

8. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of notified business.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group was scheduled to take place on the 7th October 2025, 1800hrs at Church Street Council Chamber, Newtownards. The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager advised of further dates being the 5th January 2026, 6th April 2026, 29th June 2026 and 28th September 2026.

CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 1901hrs.