

Destination Management Strategy – The Causeway Coast Way	10th April 2018
To: The Leisure and Development Committee For Decision	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and enhancing our environment and assets Promote our tourist offer locally and internationally Prosperity, Health & Wellbeing & Cohesive Community
Outcome	Improved access to our natural environment, development of visitor economy and health and well- being opportunities
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation
Cost: (If applicable)	TBC

The purpose of this report is to present a blueprint for the development of the Causeway Coast Way walking trail, and seek Members' approval to pursue the strategic direction outlined and deliver on, where possible, the recommended actions.

Background

At the Leisure and Development meeting in December 2016, Council Officers presented an information item providing background information on the Causeway Coast Way (CCW), a 33 mile coastal walking trail connecting Portstewart and Ballycastle. Council was asked to recognise and support efforts to upgrade the existing Causeway Coast Way walking experience to create a high quality international walking product. It was agreed that officers would bring back a more detailed paper concerning this subject for Members' consideration.

Introduction

Council officers have produced a document (attached at **Annex A**) that outlines the Causeway Coast Way in its current format, highlights issues affecting how it works as an experience and details the potential for its development, to produce a higher quality international walking trail.

The 'Blueprint' Document

The document relates to the entire Causeway Coast Way walking trail, a 33 mile coastal walking trail connecting Portstewart and Ballycastle.

It provides background information concerning the history and development of the walking trail to date, and sets the context in both regional and national terms.

Through an analysis of the existing trail and walking experience, current shortcomings are identified and interventions proposed for consideration.

The main proposed interventions are summarised as follows:

- Review existing permissive path agreements along the CCW and propose an appropriate mechanism to secure and extend existing public access for at least the next 20-25 years.

- Conduct a trail condition survey to identify priority sections for upgrading works, identify appropriate maintenance materials and standards, and agree an action plan for proposed works.
- Engage with the local landowners in an attempt to identify and create new off-road sections on coastal farm land.
- Identify suitable sites for the development of trail heads at strategic locations along the CCW.
- Explore the need for the installation of monitoring equipment at strategic locations along the route.
- Establish a steering group to manage the development of, and implement interventions for, the CCW.
- Explore opportunities for trade engagement to boost economic benefits.
- Explore opportunities for visitor engagement and marketing to domestic and international visitors.

The main thrust of the document, and indeed the proposed vision, is to identify opportunities that maximise the amount of new off-road walking over coastal land, giving due recognition to the need for early and meaningful engagement with the relevant private landowners.

A key objective through the fulfilment of the proposals is to create a high quality off-road walking experience, with international standout and iconic representation through a range of media that promotes the area as a must-see visitor destination and bestows the benefits from any improvements to the local outdoor recreation agenda.

Next steps

The Leisure and Development Committee members have been issued with a 'Blueprint' document on the Causeway Coast Way. A summary presentation will be presented to the Committee by Council officers outlining the body of the report including the proposed interventions for realising the vision statement.

Recommendation

Members' approval is sought to pursue the strategic direction outlined in the Blueprint for the Causeway Coast Way and to deliver on, where possible, the recommended interventions detailed. It is noted that the success of delivery is subject to the need for negotiations regarding securing public access over land, legal constraints and funding priorities.