

National Access Forum Sub-Group: Core Paths and OS mapping

Minutes from the 4th meeting: Thurs. 21 September 2017 (SG Office: Victoria Quay)

Attendance -

David Henderson Howat - Chair
Janice Winning (Secretary for NAF)
Mark Wrightham (SNH)
Helen Todd (Ramblers)
George Menzies (Scotways)
Alan Bannister (South Lanarkshire Council)
Shona Nicol – (Digital Directorate SG)
Felicity Rollings (GIS Analyst – SG)

Apologies – Angus Duncan (Falkirk Council), Kenny Auld (LLTNP)

1. Note of the previous meeting and action points.

AP1: *discharged* A note explaining the background to core paths and the Scottish Parliament Legislative intentions for their promotion had been prepared (see Annex 1)

AP2: *Carried forward:* a meeting to review the South Lanarkshire case study and the technical points identified had not taken place as Gareth Heavisides (SG) had now moved jobs. It will be carried forward if necessary.

2. NAF case for Core Paths to be attributed on OS maps

Helen Todd explained the rationale behind the paper, which contains the narrative of why NAF wants core paths on OS maps. It outlines the historical context with fewer Scottish paths appearing on maps and their previous lack of legal protection, through to the development of Core Paths designated through the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, and the general expectation that they would appear on OS updated maps. Core paths are a national asset and there is public demand for them to be attributed on OS maps giving certainty to both those enjoying the outdoors and to land managers. There was agreement within the sub group that the case for OS mapping was valid.

3. Re Cap of the Core Path analysis work and conclusions

Shona Nicol outlined what data the Improvement Service Spatial Hub held at present, i.e. Web readable data that could be layered on top of an OS backdrop. At the moment this data set is available to anyone in the public service through the IS Spatial Hub. It is understood that in the longer term the intention is that Core Paths will be an open data set and will be available on the SE WEB.

However, for paper maps there were quality and consistency issues within the whole Scottish data set that make automatic transfer of the Core Path dataset onto the OS Mastermap difficult. This could be resolved, e.g. by re-digitising the data, but this would require resources and contacts at local authority level to answer queries. (Originally LAs were asked to map at 1:10,000 for core paths, some LAs eg South Lanarkshire had digitised at 1:1,000 others at different levels. Whilst this doesn't matter for on- line viewing it is an issue for creating paper maps.)

In order for IS to harmonise the data in the longer term, there would need to be: policy backing from SG for the work to be given priority; support from local authorities to answer

queries; a shared understanding of data standards needed for OS to accept the data sets i.e. criteria to be defined; some overview and interpretation of what is required and the scale of the work.

Up-dating the path data held by OS

OS carry out updates of their path mapping on a regular basis and it was generally accepted that while 90 % of the core paths are shown on OS maps they are just not identified as such. There were questions about whether or not paths in rural areas were being updated. Shona explained that OS are updating rural areas but maybe more slowly than urban updates. It should be possible for OS to pick up any missing routes through these updates. George Menzies said there are lots of volunteers who were happy to record path changes, Scotways do this already, so the voluntary sector could play a part. Whilst this was agreed in principle, an easy system for reporting updates was not available at present. George reiterated the system adopted by English authorities for updating RoW by OS. This system is straight forward and could easily be applied to updating Core Paths.

AP 1: S Nicol to investigate with OS mechanisms for reporting inaccurate or incomplete information about paths.

Delivering Core path data through public portals

The subgroup debated various issues related to developing access to the whole core path data set through various public portals. The whole Core Path data set exists on the IS website already but is not currently publicly available. Options discussed included making this available on SNH and FC websites, although there were questions about whether or not the public would naturally look to these websites to find the information. Currently the Long Distance Routes and Great Trails are promoted through dedicated sites (but not the SNH general web site) so public promotion of these portals would be essential. It was thought that some commercial Web sites e.g. 'Walk Highland' may also be interested in using the core path data set. One risk identified was that this could all be very piecemeal and that ultimately the goal was still to have the data available on OS. The Green Space data was currently available from OS 'Get Outside' but a subscription was required to view it.

AP 2: Approach SNH, FCS and SEWeb GIS experts to investigate the feasibility of publishing the existing Core Path dataset held by the Improvement Service as a "layer" that could be viewed against a 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 back-drop on public-facing map viewers. M Wrightham and S Nicol agreed to lead on this.

There was a wider discussion about facilitating public access and the aspirations to get Core Paths on paper maps. George emphasised that the Core Path status is important as it has a statutory basis and people have the right to be there. Mark agreed that the provision of a marked path on OS maps gives people confidence to go out into the countryside. He also raised the issue about a lack of legend description on the 1:50,000 maps on Scottish access rights which does exist on 1:25,000 maps.

AP 3: M Wrightham to provide information on improving the Legend on OS maps for S Nicol

4. Recap of the Members campaign and liaison with OS

Helen Todd gave an update since her meeting with the OS in June; there had been various emails about the technical challenges for OS in mapping core paths and making this data available on their 'Get Outside' website/portal. They remain very keen to work with the Ramblers. Helen described a new campaign which starts in October 'Out There' which is aimed at helping more people in Scotland enjoy amazing landscapes and world class access rights. As part of this campaign (?) ramblers will be asked to identify their favourite paths and check whether or not they are on the OS map.

5 Defining the requirements and resources

Shona Nicol explained that the resources for developing this work was led by her SG Policy colleagues and that the group needed to make contact with Gareth's successor or that department in SG. There was general agreement in the group of the wider benefits of promoting Core paths on OS maps from healthy living to economic development so a cross departmental policy approach would be key. Never the less the focus for outdoor recreation and wider access provision should not be lost.

AP 4: David Henderson Howat to write to SG to identify who would take on the policy role following Gareth Heaviside's transfer to a new job..

6. Next Steps

In addition to the action points identified above, further thought should be given to communications: in particular, if it proves possible for SNH/FCS/SEWeb to publish Core Path data then there will be a need to publicise this.

There should also be continued dialogue with OS about the longer term aspirations for Core paths to be put on OS paper maps and defining the scope of that work.

DOMM : to be review in New Year , depending on progress with Action Points..

ANNEX 1:

Why the National Access Forum is calling for core paths to be attributed on OS maps

The National Access Forum (NAF) was established by SNH to advise on access. NAF members are drawn from a wide range of bodies with an interest in outdoor access, including recreation and land management bodies. The NAF has set up a sub-group to take forward the forum's aspiration to see core paths attributed on OS maps. This paper sets out the reasons why the forum takes this position and why it is felt so strongly that the concept of core paths will not work as intended by the Scottish Parliament without the paths being properly mapped for full public awareness of their existence.

The historic context

Scotland has world-class public rights of access to land and inland water, establishing statutory rights of access to the vast majority of land in Scotland even when there is no path, as long as these rights are exercised responsibly. However, it is recognised that paths are important in helping to facilitate the use of these rights responsibly, especially in lowland areas. Paths give people more confidence to get outdoors and explore places they don't know, and enable them to choose to use non-motorised forms of transport. Paths also help land managers support public access, as they are more aware of where people are likely to be.

Historically, not all Scottish paths have appeared on maps, unlike in England and Wales where OS have been able to show all paths since 1949, when rights of way gained legal protection by being shown on 'definitive maps' held by local authorities. This legislation didn't apply in Scotland and over the years, without formal protection, many of Scotland's rights of way were ploughed up, built on or shrouded by vegetation. Since these paths were only rarely protected in law, it was difficult to defend them. In addition, we are aware anecdotally that some landowners didn't want maps to show paths crossing their land. So although some paths are shown as geographical features, many Scottish paths aren't shown at all. This situation has resulted in a real lack of paths (both on the ground and on maps) to give safe, pleasant routes around and between our communities, and also poor awareness of where paths exist. Scottish users, whether residents or visitors, have therefore been disadvantaged in terms of mapped paths, especially in comparison with people in England and Wales who have for decades been able to plan routes and trips using paths shown on their maps. It is recognised – and emphasised in feedback to Ramblers Scotland this year – that for less confident or experienced walkers, the difficulty of telling where paths exist in Scotland is a significant barrier to getting outdoors and participating in physical activity.

Core paths

Core paths are one type of path in Scotland, designated through the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. It was recognised by the Scottish Parliament that the density of paths was much lower in Scotland than in England and Wales and the unenforced rights of way system was not fit for purpose. SNH's advice to government in 1998 stated four aims for the proposed measures for paths and tracks and clearly showed the intention behind the creation of core paths:

- a) ensuring their use does not adversely affect land managers;
- b) ensuring they are fully used to create local path networks;
- c) ensuring new routes for all users can be developed more easily;
- d) ensuring that these routes and networks are properly mapped and promoted .

The parliament's aim in creating an innovative system of core paths was to benefit present day, rather than historic, needs of all users and also, importantly, to benefit the needs of present day land managers. In s17 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, reference is made to this balance of interests and the legislation also includes a recognition that the intentions behind the core paths system would only be achieved with good maps of various

types, so that core paths were well enough known by the public to effectively fulfil these purposes.

Therefore the legislation offered an opportunity to kick start the process of developing more paths, while at the same time offering a reassurance to farmers that most people would be exercising their new statutory rights through the use of paths. There was a widely-held expectation that once each core paths plan was adopted, the process of updating OS maps to include core paths would automatically start. Discussion between SNH and OS was ongoing throughout this time, but perhaps due to changes in job roles and lack of a formal timescale, core paths appear to have slipped off the agenda.

Core path plans were drawn up by access authorities after consultation with communities, land managers and path users, to reflect local priorities with the aim of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area. Following a significant investment of public funds, core paths were adopted by access authorities and now have a high level of legitimacy given the process that led to their designation, which in many cases included going through a public inquiry to deal with objections. Plans can't be amended without a formal process which includes public consultation and therefore the number of future changes is not likely to be high.

Although it was hoped that the process would lead to the expansion of the path network, only around 5% of the 20,000km of core paths were new, perhaps due to a lack of resources to develop these new routes within the set timescales. Nevertheless, even though many of these paths are shown on OS maps, their special attribution is not understood or appreciated by the public. Core paths have an extra layer of protection, as local authorities have powers to maintain and promote core paths and a duty keep them free from obstructions. They can be designated in places where statutory access rights don't apply, such as through farmyards or close to buildings, and their status enables them to be promoted to users without the need to negotiate their route with landowners.

Why should core paths go on OS maps?

There is public demand for paths to be attributed, evidenced by the fact that over 1,000 people, including walkers, climbers, cyclists, horse riders and business owners, supported Ramblers Scotland's campaign to add core paths to the OS maps.

Core paths plans are a national asset and yet they are not currently attributed on OS maps, or available in a user-friendly format. If members of the public want to find core paths they need to search local authority websites for individual maps which are often very large files, and poorly-presented documents. The disappointing result is that these paths, which were identified through a process of public consultation as being of local importance for recreation and for active travel, are hidden away for use mainly by the access authority.

If designated and highlighted on OS maps, core paths would give certainty to both those enjoying the outdoors and to land managers, and would be a big help when planning and promoting routes. In urban areas they could be shown in the same way that rights of way are already shown on maps south of the border.

Some core paths need to be better maintained and protected and some of the plans need a limited proportion of the data to be amended, but all core paths plans are now available on the Improvement Service Spatial Hub and this process has led to an updating of some of the data. The maps on the Spatial Hub are not, however, available to the public in an OS format.

In terms of the barriers which stop people walking more often, these include physical barriers, such as the availability and accessibility of paths, and knowledge barriers, such as lack of information, signage and websites. Showing core paths on OS maps would help to reduce these barriers and also help to engage the public in path surveys, maintenance and promotion.

Conclusions

There has been significant public investment in drawing up core paths plans which are currently not in a usable format for the general public. The result of this investment has

therefore not led to an outcome which would deliver the public benefits that the parliament expected in 2003.

For a relatively small further investment to attribute core paths on digital OS maps, these plans could be made accessible to all, bringing health, social, economic and environmental benefits, and helping to deliver the government's outcomes on increasing access to the outdoors, improving health and raising participation in physical activity.

Helen Todd, Ramblers Scotland, June 2017