

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 Wednesday 17 July 2024 at 6:00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor McKimm

Alderman: Graham

Councillors: Creighton
Harbinson
Hollywood
Irwin
McKee

Officers: Director of Community and Wellbeing (G Bannister), Head of Parks & Cemeteries (S Daye), Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager (J Bettes) and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau)

At the beginning of the meeting the Director explained that the lift at Church Street had broken down and was in the process of being repaired. It was for that reason that the meeting was taking place in his office on the ground floor rather than the Council Chamber. He gave apologies for that.

NOTED.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Alderman McRandal and Councillors Cochrane and W Irvine.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest notified.

NOTED.

The Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager (J Bettes) was introduced at the start of the meeting, and he described his role explaining that he had responsibility for the community engagement side of the future development of the Coastal Path.

Members were informed that a further member of staff Rachael Ludlow-Williams (Greenways & Community Trails Development Officer) had been appointed and had taken up her role the previous day.

NOTED.

3. MINUTES OF NORTH DOWN COASTAL PATH WORKING GROUP MEETING DATED 29 APRIL 2024

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Minutes of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group meeting dated 29 April 2024.

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

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXTERNAL MEMBERS OF WORKING GROUP

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in January 2023 Elected Members agreed to withdraw the planning application for the proposed Kinnegar to Donaghadee Greenway Scheme and instead to set up a Task & Finish Working Group to address issues of connectivity, access and maintenance along the North Down Coastal Path.

In September 2023, the Council agreed a Terms of Reference that included the requirement to “invite interested groups, and those with specific expertise to be represented on the Working Group”. At the North Down Coastal Path Working Group meeting on 29 April 2024 a procedure for selecting representatives of up to five community partner organisations was agreed.

Stage 1: Open advertisement requesting applications from interested groups or organisations. The group would be required to specify the main person representing the group and two deputies.

Stage 2 - Proposed Assessment Process: a written application process with Chairperson and Council Officers putting a recommendation to the Working Group with successful groups invited to the September 2024 meeting.

Advertising of Community Partners took place between the period 13 June to 10 July 2024 in local newspapers, social media and council website. In addition, all information was also posted on the North Down Coastal Path website: www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/ndcp, including minutes and agenda of previous meetings.

Six applications were received, and an evaluation of the applications took place on 16th July 2024 at Bangor City Hall. The evaluation was carried out by the Chairperson of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group, the Director of Community & Wellbeing, the Head of Parks & Cemeteries & the Parks & Cemeteries Development Manager. The results of the evaluation were below:

Group	Total	Rank
For Another Path	40	1
Friends of Columbanus	39	2
Greenspaces Group	36	3
AND Cycle Campaign Group	36	3
Bangor Chamber of Commerce Group	30	5
Boom Studios Group	29	6

RECOMMENDED that the above is noted and that the recommendations for External Members of North Down Coastal Path Working Group are that the following five groups, being the top five scoring, are invited to attend meetings of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group for a period of 12 months starting in September 2024.

- For Another Path
- Friends of Columbanus
- Greenspaces Group
- AND Cycle Campaign Group
- Bangor Chamber of Commerce Group

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries outlined the report and the process taken to reach the above recommendation of appointing the top five scoring groups. Those groups would be invited to be represented at the September meeting of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group. Others would also be invited to represent the views of the city of Bangor and the towns of Holywood and Donaghadee.

Councillor Harbinson asked to make an alternative recommendation which was to include all six of the applicants, particularly since Boom had failed to reach the target by only one point. He wondered if that suggestion could be accommodated, and if Boom added to the list and his proposal was seconded by Councillor Hollywood.

Alderman Graham had no particular objection to Councillor Harbinson’s proposal but thought that through the development process gaps may be exposed and that there might be a desire to add further interest groups at a later stage. However, if there remained six then there would be no difficulty in his mind.

The Chair was in agreement with the addition of Boom thinking that it was in the spirit of inclusiveness. Councillor Hollywood wondered how many would be expected from each interest group and it was thought that there would be a key

representative with a deputy from each. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that the group could comprise more community members than Elected Members and he encouraged their full participation in future meetings.

In finishing Members were in general agreement with the amendment but Alderman Graham stated that he was reluctant to change what had been discussed previously in relation to a maximum of 5 partners and asked to be recorded as against.

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Harbinson, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that all six applicants be invited to participate on the North Down Coastal Path Working group.

5. FUTURE WORKS ON THE COASTAL PATH

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that the North Down Coastal Path Working Group had a budget of £150,000 per annum, further to the agreement that Officers would progress the 2024/5 budget, the deliver 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 can be progressed in the September meeting of the Working Group, in time for the budget setting process.

RECOMMENDED that the above report is noted.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries outlined the annual budget of £150k to Members and the guide on how the amounts would be spent and planned for in the 2024/25 budget. £80k was budgeted for path repairs and surveys and that could also include planning applications where appropriate. New, more environmentally sustainable methods of weed control were also being considered for use on the path and those were built into the budget.

Councillor McKee referred to the land surveys which were being carried out over the summer months. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries confirmed that there was work planned but the budget outlined was flexible with environmental surveys required before some work could be started.

Alderman Graham saw no problem with chemicals being used particularly if those were still legal and he cautioned unnecessary expense for what he considered to be ideological reasons. It was noted however that there was a present proposal to ban those chemicals and the Head of Parks and Cemeteries said that there was not one answer and a collection of options was being considered for effective non-chemical weed control.

Countering the Alderman's view Councillor Crieghton said that it was clear that the Council needed to support biodiversity.

The Chair (Councillor McKimm) referred to the funds of £80k for path repairs and surveys and wondered if the Assets and Property Services also had a budget for those areas. It was confirmed that Parks, Cleansing and Assets and Property has budgets for council owned areas of the path and that was in addition to the £150k that had been set aside in this report for the Coastal Path. The Council could only maintain the parts of the path that it owned but could assist other landowners who might find their areas difficult to manage, if appropriate legal agreements could be made.

The Chair recognised the diversity of opinion on how the environment was managed and hoped that it would be protected. He also explained that this report was only a general introduction, and that Members should not be pre-emptive. The Director added that much of the preparatory work was being undertaken presently.

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Harbinson that the recommendation be adopted.

6. APP - GIS MAP OF COASTAL PATH DEMO

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: GIS link: [North Down Coastal Path Viewer \(ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk\)](https://ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

Members showed a keen interest in the map on the Councils GIS platform which was shown indicating the areas of the path which were owned by the Council. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries highlighted that the Council owned only a percentage of the the Coastal Path. The Director added that Members could view the link only at organisational level on the Council network. Business Technology could provide further help on that if necessary.

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Hollywood, seconded by Councillor McKee to note.

7. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

8. FUTURE MEETINGS & SITE VISITS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the following meetings had been scheduled for the North Down Coastal Path Working Group in 2025:

- 6 January
- 31 March
- 30 June

All above meetings had been scheduled for 6pm to 9pm at the Council Chamber, Church Street Offices, Newtownards.

At present no site visits had been scheduled and Members were asked to consider if this would be something Members would consider useful.

RECOMMENDED the above report is noted.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries explained that the dates were being set and would be helpful in advising the community groups of future dates of the Working Group.

When the Chair asked Members if anything had come to them during the meeting Alderman Graham thought that the map that had been shown of the area around the path showed the complexity of the challenges which would be faced.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries explained the surveys that were taking place and much of that work had already been carried out. The Director added that the first task was to identify all areas that may need attention no matter who owned the lands or what the requirement was, and then to prioritise which should be actioned first. At some stage it would not be impossible to consider areas of land that would benefit from being taken over by the Council, but Council should ensure that land that it is responsible for are satisfactory first.

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Irwin that the recommendation be adopted.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING (30 SEPTEMBER 2024)

Members were in agreement with the proposed date and the option of holding further Working Group meetings in Newtownards.

AGREED.

CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 6.42 pm.