



A section of the Pencaitland Railway Walk

## Council investing funds in developing paths and cycleways

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MORE than £2million has been invested in improving paths and cycle routes across East Lothian, the local authority has said.

East Lothian Council said it had developed its Core Paths Plan to include 340km of existing core paths, with a further 14km of 'aspirational' core paths, identified by local communities, also created.

It said the aspirational paths, 17km of which have been identified in total, were routes which "did not exist on the ground but were highlighted by local people as 'missing links'".

The council said it had invested £2.2million in path development over the last six years, with two-thirds of the funding coming from outside sources.

Among the external investors were Sustrans Community Links, SEStran, Paths For All, community councils, landowner contributions, Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme, Nortrail, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tyne Esk Leader, Viridor and Scottish Rural Development Programme.

Among the main paths developed are the John Muir Way, now part of the 215km national coast-to-coast route across central Scotland from Dunbar to Helensburgh; the Haddington to Longniddry Railway Walk, which forms part of National Cycle Route 76; Pencaitland Railway Walk (National Cycle Route 196); and Whitecraig to Smeaton Railway Path, which forms part of National Cycle Route 1, connecting Dalkeith to Edinburgh.

In 2011, a path warden scheme of volunteers, who assist the council by monitoring and undertaking basic maintenance

and upgrading work on core paths in their local area, was formed and there are currently 45 volunteer path wardens looking after the majority of East Lothian's designated core paths, undertaking more than 2,000 hours of voluntary work in 2015/16.

The East Lothian Path Wardens are now a constituted group and registered charity.

Investment in safer routes to school, Walk to School Week

**“We are committed to developing and enhancing our path and cycle network to achieve a healthier East Lothian**

campaigns and promoting the benefits of active travel around schools has resulted in East Lothian being the top performing local authority in Scotland for the past eight years, with almost 90 per cent of school pupils using active travel modes, compared to the national average of 49.7 per cent.

Path counters have been installed on many of the new or upgraded paths around communities, and they show a marked increase in use following upgrading work. For instance, visitor numbers on the Knowes right of way increased from 1,500 to over 7,000 a year after it was upgraded. Path counters on the Gifford path network showed a similar increase in use.

Councillor John McMillan, spokesperson for economic development and tourism, said:

“East Lothian, with its spectacular coast and countryside and accessible path network, on Edinburgh's doorstep, is increasingly a visitor destination for walking and cycling. The recent East Lothian Visitor Survey (2015) highlighted the importance to East Lothian's economy of walking tourism, and showed that walks and scenery are key attractions.

“The survey also showed that the John Muir Way is one of East Lothian's most popular attractions.

“We are, as a council, committed to further developing and enhancing our path and cycle network to achieve a healthier East Lothian, with a view to becoming Scotland's leading coastal and leisure destination.

“Our current success is very much down to the understanding of how important the access strategy is in contributing to safe access and respect for the environment. It is an exemplary working partnership between walkers, cyclists, riders and landowners working constructively with our council officers and countryside rangers to promote all that East Lothian has to offer.”

Work will continue to ensure the path network is maintained to a high standard. Recent path upgrading works have been undertaken near Macmerry, New Winton and Tranent, in response to priorities identified by residents through the area partnerships. Other projects scheduled for the current financial year include upgrading paths in Gifford, Aberlady and Dunbar, and further works on the National Cycle Network in East Lothian; further upgrading work on the Pencaitland Railway Walk; and upgrading of the North Sea Cycle Route (National Cycle Route 76) past the cement works at Dunbar.