

Aberdeenshire Council

Integrated Impact Assessment

Natural Environment Planning & Projects - Absorption of Budget Pressures 2024/25

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1. Overview

This document has been generated from information entered into the Integrated Impact Assessment system.

Absorption of budget pressures (£219K) in relation to Ash Dieback Disease (£20K); Nature Networks and Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plans (£20K); 2.6FTE Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers (£68K); 1 FTE Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) (£60K) and general inflation and pay award increases (£51K) under the Natural Environment Planning & Projects budget page.

Ash Dieback is the most significant tree disease to effect broadleaved trees in the UK. Research by the Tree Council has estimated that the disease will lead to the decline and death of 50-75% of ash trees in Scotland within the next 20 years. Due to the unique effects of the disease, infected and dead trees cannot safely be left as standing deadwood. Early intervention is therefore critical. As supported at Infrastructure Services Committee on 24/08/23 there is a need for an Ash Dieback Action Plan with prioritised actions. This involves initial survey work through a dedicated Ash Dieback Surveyor to identify the presence of ash dieback on council land.

New Legislative Requirements are to be placed on Local Authorities relating to Nature Networks and Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plans. New commitments are being placed on Local Authorities to protecting 30% of land and seas for nature by 2030 and ensuring that every local authority area has a Nature Network to improve ecological connectivity across Scotland. Preparation work involving surveying and mapping is now required to start the development process of delivering against the targets and delivering nature networks. This is a new piece of work. Specialised work involves gathering external biodiversity information and analysing and mapping the data to provide baseline information for the development of nature networks. This bespoke information would need to be a contracted piece of work as this information is not available to Aberdeenshire Council.

The Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers have been employed for fixed term periods since 2021. In 2021 and 2022 funding was provided by NatureScot. In 2023 the funding bid was unsuccessful. Funding contributions from Area Budgets and Coastal Communities Funds which have been utilised since 2021 are not viewed as being long term for the posts in the future. There continues to be a demand for there to be a Council presence at hot spot countryside sites to improve the visitor experience; promote responsible and sustainable low-impact visitor behaviours; and reduce the impact of greatly increased visitor numbers at hot spot sites on communities, land managers, and Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage.

The Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) is the dedicated Council resource to help facilitate and deliver the Coast Aberdeenshire Project and aspiration to have a continuous coastal path between Cullen and St Cyrus which there is strong political and community support for, including from Aberdeenshire's Lord Lieutenants.

During screening 7 of 10 questions indicated that detailed assessments were required, the screening questions and their answers are listed in the next section. This led to 4 out of 5 detailed impact assessments being completed. The assessments required are:

- Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty
- Health Inequalities
- Sustainability and Climate Change
- Town Centres First

In total there are 31 positive impacts as part of this activity. There are 8 negative impacts, all impacts have been mitigated.

A detailed action plan with 4 points has been provided.

This assessment has been approved by ewan.wallace@aberdeenshire.gov.uk.

The remainder of this document sets out the details of all completed impact assessments.

2. Screening

| | |
|---|-----|
| Could your activity / proposal / policy cause an impact in one (or more) of the identified town centres? | Yes |
| Would this activity / proposal / policy have consequences for the health and wellbeing of the population in the affected communities? | Yes |
| Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect greenhouse gas emissions (CO2e) in the Council or community and / or the procurement, use or disposal of physical resources? | Yes |
| Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect the resilience to extreme weather events and/or a changing climate of Aberdeenshire Council or community? | Yes |
| Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity? | Yes |
| Does the activity / proposal / policy have an impact on people and / or groups with protected characteristics? | Yes |
| Is this activity / proposal / policy of strategic importance for the council? | Yes |
| Does this activity / proposal / policy impact on inequality of outcome? | No |
| Does this activity / proposal / policy have an impact on children / young people's rights? | No |
| Does this activity / proposal / policy have an impact on children / young people's wellbeing? | No |

3. Impact Assessments

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Children's Rights and Wellbeing | Not Required |
| Climate Change and Sustainability | All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated |
| Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty | No Negative Impacts Identified |
| Health Inequalities | All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated |
| Town Centre's First | All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated |

4. Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment

4.1. Protected Groups

| Indicator | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Unknown |
|-------------------------------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| Age (Younger) | | Yes | | |
| Age (Older) | | Yes | | |
| Disability | Yes | | | |
| Race | | Yes | | |
| Religion or Belief | | Yes | | |
| Sex | | Yes | | |
| Pregnancy and Maternity | | Yes | | |
| Sexual Orientation | | Yes | | |
| Gender Reassignment | | Yes | | |
| Marriage or Civil Partnership | | Yes | | |

4.2. Socio-economic Groups

| Indicator | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Unknown |
|--------------------------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| Low income | | Yes | | |
| Low wealth | | Yes | | |
| Material deprivation | | Yes | | |
| Area deprivation | | Yes | | |
| Socioeconomic background | | Yes | | |

4.3. Positive Impacts

| Impact Area | Impact |
|-------------|---|
| Disability | By having the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) in post it will help deliver the upgrading of existing sections of the coastal path and the development of new sections which allows for there to be potential for the coastal path to be more accessible to users (where the characteristics of the site allow) with a disability than the current coastal path. This brings physical and mental health benefits as it allows more people to access the outdoors. |

4.4. Evidence

| Type | Source | It says? | It Means? |
|------|--------|----------|-----------|
|------|--------|----------|-----------|

| Type | Source | It says? | It Means? |
|---------------|--|---|--|
| External Data | Mental Health Foundation - https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/nature-how-connecting-nature-benefits-our-mental-health | <p>Spending time in nature is good for us for lots of reasons. "Fresh air and exercise" have long been recommended as a way for many to feel better, physically and mentally.</p> <p>Now evidence shows us that the quality of our relationship with nature is part of the reason for its positive impact on our wellbeing.</p> <p>Researchers use the term "connectedness" to describe the ideal relationship.</p> | By being outdoors and allowing people to connect more with nature it helps people feel better physically and mentally. |
| Internal Data | Work of Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers 2021 - 2023 | It demonstrated that there were no impacts in terms of the Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty Acts. | There will be no impacts on people with protected characteristics as a result of having the Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers in post. |

4.5. Engagement with affected groups

The Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) will help facilitate the engagement Aberdeenshire Council will undertake with communities on sections of the coastal path which it has responsibility for when looking to repair and upgrade these sections. Aberdeenshire Council (which the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) is a key part of) is looking to facilitate and empower communities themselves to develop and upgrade sections of the coastal path which the Council does not have responsibility for.

The Ash Dieback Surveyor would engage with council services, the community and individual landowners relating to health and safety and amenity issues relating to trees impacted with ash dieback.

To develop Nature Networks as part of protecting 30% of council land for nature there will be a need to engage with council services and communities.

4.6. Ensuring engagement with protected groups

Aberdeenshire Council through the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) will look to do this when engaging with communities on proposals.

The Ash Dieback Surveyor would engage with council services, the community and individual landowners relating to health and safety and amenity issues relating to trees impacted with ash dieback

To develop Nature Networks as part of protecting 30% of council land for nature there will be a need to engage with council services and communities.

4.7. Evidence of engagement

For sections of the coastal path being looked at already, this has been undertaken through the Coast Aberdeenshire project along the north coast of Aberdeenshire. This has been undertaken through a range of public engagement sessions including interactive online sessions and surveys. Although not at the same scale, engagement has been undertaken with communities through relevant groups through different verbal and written communication methods.

Amendments are made where possible to do so taking into account the characteristics of the site and if budget/funding is available. A similar approach will look to be undertaken for future sections. This engagement is not possible if there is no Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post.

The development of an Ash Dieback Action Plan and Nature Networks would involve other council services. No further engagement with landowners and communities would be possible without the initial survey work on ash trees and gathering external biodiversity information and analysing and mapping the data to provide baseline information for the development of nature networks.

4.8. Overall Outcome

No Negative Impacts Identified.

Through having the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) in post the coastal path will only be improved, not made less accessible. If there is limited access for those with a disability at present this won't reduce, and it will either remain as per the present situation or result in a positive impact if more access can be provided.

The work which the Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers, the Ash Dieback Surveyor and a dedicated resource relating to Nature Networks does not have any negative impacts in this respect.

4.9. Improving Relations

Having the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post will ensure continued engagement with communities and appropriate groups keeping them regularly updated as to how works progress.

The Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers will engage with people from all groups and areas which they meet at countryside sites.

The Ash Dieback Surveyor and a dedicated Nature Networks resource will support further engagement with those impacted with ash dieback issues and support future engagement on the delivery of Nature Networks

4.10. Opportunities of Equality

By having the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) in post will allow for communities to engage and provide feedback on proposals for development of the coastal path.

The Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers will engage with people from all groups and areas which they meet at countryside sites. They will engage with and support everyone of all backgrounds that they meet when undertaking their hot spot patrols.

By having the Ash Dieback Surveyor in post and a dedicated resource for Nature Networks it will allow for landowners and communities to engage and provide feedback on proposals relating to

trees and greenspace in their area.

5. Health Inequalities Impact Assessment

5.1. Health Behaviours

| Indicator | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Unknown |
|--------------------------------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| Healthy eating | | Yes | | |
| Exercise and physical activity | Yes | | Yes | |
| Substance use – tobacco | | Yes | | |
| Substance use – alcohol | | Yes | | |
| Substance use – drugs | | Yes | | |
| Mental health | Yes | | Yes | |

5.2. Positive Impacts

| Impact Area | Impact |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Exercise and physical activity | The Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post will help ensure the repair and upgrade of existing sections of the coastal path, while the development of new sections will increase and improve opportunities for people to use the route increasing exercise and physical activity. |
| Exercise and physical activity | Appropriate management of diseased trees within council owned parks and open spaces will allow individuals and communities to continue to enjoy these areas for the purposes of exercise and physical activity. |
| Exercise and physical activity | The development of Nature Networks has the potential to create new spaces and corridors for individuals and communities to enjoy these areas for the purposes of exercise. |
| Mental health | The Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post helps ensure the repair and upgrade of existing sections of the coastal path along with development of new sections which will increase and improve opportunities for people to use the route increasing opportunities for people to exercise and get outdoors which benefits people's mental health. |
| Mental health | Appropriate management of diseased trees within council owned parks and open spaces, including a scheme of replacement planting will ensure continued high quality greenspace which has been shown to contribute significantly to improved mental health. |
| Mental health | The development of Nature Networks has the potential to create new spaces and corridors for individuals and communities to enjoy. These areas have been shown to contribute significantly to improved mental health. |

5.3. Negative Impacts and Mitigations

| Impact Area | Details and Mitigation |
|-------------|------------------------|
|-------------|------------------------|

| Impact Area | Details and Mitigation |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Exercise and physical activity | <p>Without protection of nature rich sites through Nature Networks and if diseased trees within council owned parks and open spaces are not appropriately identified, assessed and managed there would be a higher risk to individuals and communities using these spaces for the purposes of exercise and physical activity. Similarly closure of these areas due to dangerous or fallen trees would limit their use for exercise and physical activity.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Undertake a survey of ash dieback on council land to assist the development of a prioritised action plan for assessment, monitoring and removal of diseased trees. Specialised work, gathering external biodiversity information and analysing and mapping the data to provide baseline information for the development of Nature Networks.</p> <p>Timescale 2 years</p> |
| Mental health | <p>Without appropriate protection of nature rich sites through the development of Nature Networks and management of diseased trees within council owned parks and open spaces or, if these areas require to be closed for safety reasons, there will be a reduction in the quality of green space which can have a resultant impact on the mental health of individuals and communities. Similarly, loss of diseased trees without a scheme of replacement planting will result in a reduction in the quality of green space which can have a resultant impact on the mental health of individuals and communities.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Undertake a survey of ash dieback on council land to assist the development of a prioritised action plan for assessment, monitoring and removal of diseased trees. Specialised work, gathering external biodiversity information and analysing and mapping the data to provide baseline information for the development of Nature Networks.</p> <p>Timescale 2 years</p> |

5.4. Evidence

| Type | Source | It says? | It Means? |
|------|--------|----------|-----------|
|------|--------|----------|-----------|

| Type | Source | It says? | It Means? |
|---------------|--|--|--|
| External Data | Mental Health Foundation - https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/nature-how-connecting-nature-benefits-our-mental-health | <p>Spending time in nature is good for us for lots of reasons. “Fresh air and exercise” have long been recommended as a way for many to feel better, physically and mentally.</p> <p>Now evidence shows us that the quality of our relationship with nature is part of the reason for its positive impact on our wellbeing. Researchers use the term “connectedness” to describe the ideal relationship.</p> | By being outdoors and allowing people to connect more with nature it helps people feel better physically and mentally. |

5.5. Overall Outcome

All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated.

The Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post helps ensure the repair and upgrade of existing sections of the coastal path along with the development of new sections, which encourages and allows more people to use the coastal path which increases the opportunity for people to exercise improving their physical and mental health.

By appropriately managing the impact of ash dieback disease, including removal of dangerous trees and with a scheme of replacement planting, it will be possible to retain quality greenspace which has a positive impact on the physical and mental health of individuals and communities. This will be progressed by undertaking a survey of ash dieback on council land.

By developing Nature Networks it will be possible to create and retain quality greenspace which has a positive impact on the physical and mental health of individuals and communities. This will be progressed by undertaking specialised work, gathering external biodiversity information and analysing and mapping the data to provide Baseline information.

6. Sustainability and Climate Change Impact Assessment

6.1. Emissions and Resources

| Indicator | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Unknown |
|-----------------------------------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| Consumption of energy | | Yes | | |
| Energy efficiency | | Yes | | |
| Energy source | | Yes | | |
| Low carbon transition | Yes | | | |
| Consumption of physical resources | | Yes | | |
| Waste and circularity | | Yes | | |
| Circular economy transition | | Yes | | |
| Economic and social transition | Yes | | | |

6.2. Biodiversity and Resilience

| Indicator | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Unknown |
|---------------------------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| Quality of environment | Yes | | | |
| Quantity of environment | | Yes | | |
| Wildlife and biodiversity | Yes | | Yes | |
| Infrastructure resilience | Yes | | | |
| Council resilience | Yes | | | |
| Community resilience | Yes | | | |
| Adaptation | Yes | | | |

6.3. Positive Impacts

| Impact Area | Impact |
|-------------|---|
| Adaptation | The repair and upgrade of existing sections of the coastal path and development of new sections, which the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post helps ensure deliver, will support active travel where it links between existing settlements. |
| Adaptation | A scheme of replacement planting provides an opportunity to consider a more diverse range of species suitable to a changing climate. |
| Adaptation | The creation of Nature Networks connects nature-rich sites, restoration areas, and other environmental projects through a series of areas of suitable habitat, habitat corridors and stepping-stones. Connectivity is an essential part of nature. It is necessary for functioning and healthy ecosystems, key for the survival of animal and plant species, and is crucial to ensuring genetic diversity and adaptation to pressures such as climate change. |

| Impact Area | Impact |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Council resilience | The repair and upgrade of existing sections of the coastal path which Aberdeenshire Council has responsibility for which the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post will deliver, will ensure these sections are more resilient to climate change, coastal erosion and extreme weather events. |
| Infrastructure resilience | The repair and upgrade of existing sections of the coastal path and development of new sections which the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post will help facilitate delivery, will help ensure it is more resilient to climate change, coastal erosion and extreme weather events. |
| Quality of environment | <p>Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers will actively engage with visitors at hot spot sites, providing a warm welcome and promoting awareness and understanding of access rights and responsibilities through the key messages in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. This will improve the visitor experience and reduce the impact of increased visitor numbers on communities and our natural and cultural heritage.</p> <p>Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers will positively engage with visitors to encourage action such as the use of public transport, cycling and walking to access hot spot sites, particularly those adjacent to long distance routes; along with how inappropriate behaviour not in accordance with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code can have a negative impact on the enjoyment of other visitors, local communities, and Aberdeenshire’s natural and cultural heritage.</p> <p>Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers will take practical action such as removal of fire scars, litter picks and blocking of inappropriate desire lines which will support lower impact responsible enjoyment and sustainable management of sites.</p> <p>Impacts from increased visitor numbers at hot spot sites will be monitored through regular patrols. This information will be fed into future Aberdeenshire Visitor Management Plans to help deliver its aim, objectives and identified actions. Through the Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers positively engaging with communities, land managers and other stakeholders it helps deliver the priorities of: health and wellbeing; resilient communities; and economic growth of the Aberdeenshire Council Plan 2022-2027.</p> |
| Quality of environment | Appropriate management of diseased trees, including retention of moderately affected trees in low risk areas will result in a positive impact on the quality of the environment of Aberdeenshire. Replacement planting of tree species selected with climate change resilience in mind will ensure the continuation of a high quality environment in Aberdeenshire in the future. |

| Impact Area | Impact |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Quality of environment | Appropriate management of diseased trees, including retention of moderately affected trees in low risk areas will result in a positive impact on the quality of the environment of Aberdeenshire. Replacement planting of tree species selected with climate change resilience in mind will ensure the continuation of a high quality environment in Aberdeenshire in the future. |
| Quality of environment | Appropriate management of trees affected by ash dieback disease and development of a scheme of replacement planting will ensure the quality of the environment of Aberdeenshire is retained. |
| Quality of environment | The creation of Nature Networks connects nature-rich sites, restoration areas, and other environmental projects through a series of areas of suitable habitat, habitat corridors and stepping-stones. Connectivity is an essential part of nature. It is necessary for functioning and healthy ecosystems, key for the survival of animal and plant species, and is crucial to ensuring genetic diversity and adaptation to pressures such as climate change. |
| Community resilience | The repair and upgrade of existing sections of the coastal path and development of new sections by communities where they have responsibility, which the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post will help facilitate delivery, will ensure these sections are more resilient to climate change, coastal erosion and extreme weather events. |

| Impact Area | Impact |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Wildlife and biodiversity | <p>Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers will actively engage with visitors at hot spot sites, providing a warm welcome and promoting awareness and understanding of access rights and responsibilities through the key messages in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. This will improve the visitor experience and reduce the impact of increased visitor numbers on communities and our natural and cultural heritage.</p> <p>Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers will positively engage with visitors to encourage action such as the use of public transport, cycling and walking to access hot spot sites, particularly those adjacent to long distance routes; along with how inappropriate behaviour not in accordance with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code can have a negative impact on the enjoyment of other visitors, local communities, and Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage.</p> <p>Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers will take practical action such as removal of fire scars, litter picks and blocking of inappropriate desire lines which will support lower impact responsible enjoyment and sustainable management of sites. Impacts from increased visitor numbers at hot spot sites will be monitored through regular patrols. This information will be fed into future Aberdeenshire Visitor Management Plans to help deliver its aim, objectives and identified actions. Through the Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers positively engaging with communities, land managers and other stakeholders it helps deliver the priorities of: health and wellbeing; resilient communities; and economic growth of the Aberdeenshire Council Plan 2022-2027.</p> |
| Wildlife and biodiversity | <p>Appropriate management of diseased trees, including retention of moderately affected trees in low risk areas will result in a positive impact on the natural environment and on wildlife and biodiversity in Aberdeenshire. Replacement planting of tree species selected with climate change resilience in mind will ensure the continuation of high quality habitats which will support a range of species and improve the biodiversity of Aberdeenshire in the future.</p> |
| Wildlife and biodiversity | <p>Appropriate management of trees affected by ash dieback disease and development of a scheme of replacement planting will ensure protection of wildlife and biodiversity and opportunities for biodiversity enhancement (such as increased standing dead wood) will become available.</p> |
| Wildlife and biodiversity | <p>The creation of Nature Networks connects nature-rich sites, restoration areas, and other environmental projects through a series of areas of suitable habitat, habitat corridors and stepping-stones. Connectivity is an essential part of nature. It is necessary for functioning and healthy ecosystems, key for the survival of animal and plant species, and is crucial to ensuring genetic diversity and adaptation to pressures such as climate change.</p> |

| Impact Area | Impact |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Economic and social transition | The repair and upgrade of existing sections of the coastal path and development of new sections, which the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post will help facilitate delivery of, will support active travel where it links between existing settlements. |
| Low carbon transition | The repair and upgrade of existing sections of the coastal path and development of new sections, which the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) will help facilitate delivery of, will support active travel where it links between existing settlements. |

6.4. Negative Impacts and Mitigations

| Impact Area | Details and Mitigation |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Wildlife and biodiversity | <p>There may be a negative impact on the immediately surrounding wildlife and biodiversity as a result of any repair, upgrade and new development works on the coastal path which the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post helps to facilitate delivery of.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Any repair and upgrade works proposed by Aberdeenshire Council will be reviewed in terms of potential environmental and biodiversity impacts. This will be undertaken reviewing appropriate NESBReC reports and then any further consultation with Natural Heritage Environment Planners and further survey work will be undertaken if required. Any resulting mitigation measures recommended will be implemented. Communities repairing, upgrading and developing new sections will be encouraged to take this same approach. This would all be undertaken by the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post.</p> <p>Timescale No timescale can be set at this time for each individual project.</p> |
| Wildlife and biodiversity | <p>Without appropriate management of diseased trees within Aberdeenshire, including a scheme of replacement planting, there will be a negative impact on the wildlife and biodiversity supported by ash trees and woodlands.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Development of a prioritised action plan for assessment, monitoring and removal of affected trees in high risk areas and development of a scheme of replacement planting.</p> <p>Timescale 2 years</p> |

| Impact Area | Details and Mitigation |
|---------------------------|---|
| Wildlife and biodiversity | <p>Without the creation of Nature Networks, connectivity and functioning of healthy ecosystems, key for the survival of animal and plant species and crucial to ensuring genetic diversity, adaptation would be further eroded and the impacts of the nature emergency heightened.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Gathering external biodiversity information and analysing and mapping the data to provide baseline information for the development of Nature Networks.</p> <p>Timescale 2 Years</p> |

6.5. Evidence

| Type | Source | It says? | It Means? |
|---------------|--|--|--|
| Internal Data | National, Regional and Local Transport Strategies | The travel hierarchy has walking, cycling and wheeling at the top of the prioritisation of travel modes as it has the least impact on the environment. | Travelling actively is the most sustainable mode of transport. |
| Internal Data | Work of Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers 2021 - 2023. | It demonstrated the positive impacts of the roles of the posts on Aberdeenshire's natural environment. | There is a reduced negative impact by visitors to Aberdeenshire's natural environment. |
| External Data | The Tree Council | An Action Plan toolkit for Scotland which contains resources and materials for preparing an Action Plan. | Development of a prioritised action plan for assessment, monitoring and removal, and a communication plan relating to trees effected with ash dieback. |

| Type | Source | It says? | It Means? |
|----------------|---------------------|--|---|
| External Data | NatureScot | The commitment to protect at least 30% of our land and sea for nature by 2030 (30x30) and the use of Nature Networks are key in delivering the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and tackling the Nature Emergency. | <p>A Nature Network connects nature-rich sites, restoration areas, and other environmental projects through a series of areas of suitable habitat, habitat corridors and stepping-stones. As well as supporting regional and national approaches to protect and restore nature, they provide local benefits to wildlife and people.</p> <p>Connectivity is an essential part of nature. It is necessary for functioning and healthy ecosystems, key for the survival of animal and plant species, and is crucial to ensuring genetic diversity and adaptation to pressures such as climate change.</p> <p>To ensure Scotland's nature can thrive, nature-rich areas must be connected through a series of networks linking them all together.</p> |
| Other Evidence | Scottish Government | <p>National Planning Framework 4</p> <p>https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/</p> | <p>To protect biodiversity, reverse biodiversity loss, deliver positive effects from development and strengthen nature networks.</p> <p>Biodiversity is enhanced and better connected including through strengthened nature networks and nature-based solutions.</p> |
| Other Evidence | Scottish Governemnt | <p>Scottish Biodiversity Strategy</p> <p>https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-biodiversity-strategy-2045-tackling-nature-emergency-scotland/documents/</p> | <p>To protect biodiversity, reverse biodiversity loss, deliver positive effects from development and strengthen nature networks.</p> <p>Biodiversity is enhanced and better connected including through strengthened nature networks and nature-based solutions.</p> |

6.6. Overall Outcome

All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated.

Any potential impacts on the surrounding environment and biodiversity of the coastal path will be assessed and appropriately mitigated where required for Council led projects and communities will be encouraged to do the same for projects they are leading on. This would be taken forward by the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post.

It has been demonstrated by the evidence collected between 2021 and 2023 that the role of the Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers have only had a positive impact on Aberdeenshire's natural environment.

An ash dieback survey will lead to a prioritised action plan for responding to the impact of ash dieback disease which will mitigate many of the negative impacts of the disease. Trees which are in high risk areas will be removed and moderately affected trees in low risk areas can be retained for the benefit of biodiversity. Early intervention in the removal of high risk affected trees will limit the impact on the quality of the environment and development of an appropriate scheme of replacement planting will ensure continuation of the improved quality of the environment and improvement of wildlife and biodiversity.

The development of Nature Networks aims to tackle the nature emergency and improve the quality of the environment and the impact on wildlife and biodiversity.

7. Town Centre's First Impact Assessment

7.1. Local Factors

| Indicator | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Unknown |
|--------------------------------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| Town centre assets | Yes | Yes | Yes | |
| Footfall | Yes | | | |
| Changes to road layouts | | Yes | | |
| Parking | | Yes | | |
| Infrastructure changes | | Yes | | |
| Aesthetics of the town centre | Yes | Yes | Yes | |
| Tourism | Yes | | | |
| Public safety | Yes | Yes | Yes | |
| Town centre business | Yes | | | |
| Cultural heritage and identity | Yes | Yes | | |
| Social and cultural aspects | | Yes | | |

7.2. Positive Impacts

| Impact Area | Impact |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Aesthetics of the town centre | Appropriate management of ash dieback disease to ensure timely removal of dangerous trees and a scheme of replacement planting will mean the aesthetics of town centres are retained and protected. The protection of nature-rich sites and restoration areas within our town centres, through the development of Nature Networks, will mean the aesthetics of town centres are retained and protected. |
| Cultural heritage and identity | Trees and our natural greenspaces contribute towards the cultural heritage and identity of our town centres. Appropriate management of ash dieback disease to ensure retention and timely removal of dangerous trees and a scheme of replacement planting will mean the cultural identity of town centres are retained and protected. The protection of nature-rich sites and restoration areas within our town centres, through the development of Nature Networks, will mean the cultural identity of town centres are retained and protected. |
| Footfall | In 2013, Living Streets launched The Pedestrian Pound to highlight the hidden and underestimated economic contribution of people on foot to high street economic vitality. Their reports provides strong evidence that pedestrians spend more per trip than those travelling by car. The Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post will help facilitate the repair, upgrade and development of new sections of the coastal path which will help link up settlements and identified town centres on Aberdeenshire's coast, encouraging more people into them. |

| Impact Area | Impact |
|----------------------|---|
| Public safety | Appropriate management of ash dieback disease to ensure timely removal of dangerous trees will ensure public safety within the town centre environment can be achieved. |
| Town centre assets | Appropriate management of ash dieback disease to ensure timely removal of dangerous trees and a scheme of replacement planting will mean town centre assets will be protected. Nature-rich sites and restoration areas within our town centres will be protected through the development of Nature Networks. |
| Town centre business | In 2013, Living Streets launched The Pedestrian Pound to highlight the hidden and underestimated economic contribution of people on foot to high street economic vitality. Their reports provides strong evidence that pedestrians spend more per trip than those travelling by car. The Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post will facilitate the repair, upgrade and development of new sections of the coastal path will help link up settlements and identified town centres on Aberdeenshire's coast, encouraging more people into them which will benefit town centre businesses. |
| Tourism | The Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post will facilitate repair, upgrade and development of new sections of the coastal path which will help link up settlements and identified town centres on Aberdeenshire's coast, encouraging more people into them. |

7.3. Negative Impacts and Mitigations

| Impact Area | Details and Mitigation |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Aesthetics of the town centre | <p>If nature rich sites and diseased trees are not appropriately managed and there is no scheme in place for ensuring replacement planting is carried out, there will be a detrimental impact on the aesthetics of town centres.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Undertake a survey of ash dieback on council land to assist the development of a prioritised action plan for assessment, monitoring and removal of diseased trees.</p> <p>Timescale 2 years</p> |
| Public safety | <p>Without appropriate management of ash dieback disease and the timely removal of dangerous trees it would not be possible to ensure the safety of users of the town centre environment.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Undertake a survey of ash dieback on council land to assist the development of a prioritised action plan for assessment, monitoring and removal of diseased trees.</p> <p>Timescale 2 years</p> |

| Impact Area | Details and Mitigation |
|--------------------|---|
| Town centre assets | <p>If nature rich sites and diseased trees are not appropriately managed and/or there is no scheme of replacement planting there may be a detrimental impact on town centre assets, such as damage to buildings, closure of roads/pathways and loss of town centre trees and green infrastructure.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Undertake a survey of ash dieback on council land to assist the development of a prioritised action plan for assessment, monitoring and removal of diseased trees.</p> <p>Timescale 2 years</p> |

7.4. Evidence

| Type | Source | It says? | It Means? |
|---------------|----------------|---|---|
| External Data | Living Streets | https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/2t0hyzcm/pedestrian-pound-2018.pdf | The report provides strong evidence that pedestrians spend more per trip than those arriving by car. |
| External Data | VisitScotland | <p>Research from the tourism marketing agency VisitScotland suggests that walking holidays generate up to £1.26 billion to the Scottish economy.</p> <p>VisitScotland found that in 2015, four million trips by visitors from the UK included walking as an activity, with figures broken down into short walks (up to 2 miles) and long walks (minimum of 2 miles). The latter increased by almost a fifth (18%) on the previous year.</p> <p>https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/mediaLibrary/other/english/81342.pdf</p> <p>https://www.insider.co.uk/news/walking-tourism-generates-126billion-scottish-10922596</p> | Developing a long distance walking route that is attractive to visitors has a positive impact in the local economy. This would continue to be taken forward by the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post. |

| Type | Source | It says? | It Means? |
|---------------|---------------------|--|--|
| External Data | Tree Council | https://treecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Tree-Council-Scotland-ADB-Toolkit-DIGITAL-280x210-March-21-2022.pdf | Development of a prioritised action plan for assessment, monitoring and removal of affected trees, a communication plan and a scheme of replacement planting is key to mitigating the negative impacts of ash dieback disease. |
| External Data | Scottish Governemnt | National Planning Framework 4. https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/pages/1/ Integrate nature to deliver multiple benefits to people and places. | Integrate nature to deliver economic benefits to people and places |

7.5. Overall Outcome

All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated.

The repair, upgrade and development of new sections of the coastal path will help link up settlements and identified town centres on Aberdeenshire's coast, encouraging more people into them which will encourage visitors to these locations and help benefit the businesses along with the overall vitality and viability of town centres. This work would be taken forward by the Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post.

A survey of ash dieback on council land would lead to prioritised actions for removal of dangerous trees and a scheme of replacement planting will ensure public safety and protection of assets within town centres. This will be progressed by undertaking a survey of ash dieback on council land.

Development of Nature Networks leading to the heart of our town centres not only supports wildlife and is more nature-positive, but they also become more interesting and inspiring places to live and visit. This will be progressed by undertaking specialised work, gathering external biodiversity information and analysing and mapping the data to provide Baseline information.

8. Action Plan

| Planned Action | Details | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>The Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post is key to ensuring Aberdeenshire can help facilitate the development and future sustainable maintenance and promotion of Aberdeenshire's Coastal Path Network and associated built, natural and cultural assets while ensuring inclusivity of the entire coastal path network in North East Scotland.</p> | <p>Lead Officer</p> <p>Repeating Activity</p> <p>Planned Start</p> <p>Planned Finish</p> <p>Expected Outcome</p> <p>Resource Implications</p> | <p>Malcolm White</p> <p>No</p> <p>Thursday January 28, 2016</p> <p>Monday April 02, 2035</p> <p>A complete long distance route along the coast of North East Scotland between Cullen and St Cyrus linking in with associated built, natural and cultural assets with an appropriate body in place to sustainably manage and promote the route in the future.</p> <p>The Environment Project Officer (Outdoor Access) post (£60K per year) will work within approved budget levels to help facilitate the delivery of this shared aspiration with communities.</p> |
| <p>Employ 2 x Full Time (36.25 hours per week) Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers between April and October.</p> | <p>Lead Officer</p> <p>Repeating Activity</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Duration</p> <p>Expected Outcome</p> <p>Resource Implications</p> | <p>Malcolm White</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Annually.</p> <p>April to October each year.</p> <p>2 people appointed to the posts for the period April to October each year which will result in positive impacts to Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage due to mitigating the impacts of high visitor numbers to countryside hot spot locations.</p> <p>Increased staff resource costing £68K per year. Includes Ranger Service Co-ordinator post increased by 0.2 FTE (1 day a week) to line manage the Seasonal Access Countryside Rangers and plan their work programmes when they are not in post.</p> |

| Planned Action | Details | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>An Ash Dieback Surveyor will lead to the development of an Ash Dieback Action plan including a scheme of replacement planting.</p> | <p>Lead Officer Repeating Activity Planned Start Planned Finish Expected Outcome</p> | <p>Craig Stewart No Monday April 01, 2024 Monday March 31, 2025 Assessment of number of ash trees within the council's estate and progression of disease. Prioritised action plan for tree management based on risk profile. Communications plan Scheme of replacement planting Additional staffing resource for surveying required. Seasonal surveyor for two seasons at £20k per year.</p> |
| <p>Specialised work involves gathering external biodiversity information and analysing and mapping the data to provide baseline information for the development of Nature Networks.</p> | <p>Lead Officer Repeating Activity Planned Start Planned Finish Expected Outcome</p> | <p>Craig Stewart No Monday April 01, 2024 Tuesday March 31, 2026 Baseline information to support the development of Nature Networks which would connect nature-rich sites, restoration areas, and other environmental projects through a series of areas of suitable habitat, habitat corridors and stepping-stones. As well as supporting regional and national approaches to protect and restore nature, they provide local benefits to wildlife and people. Dedicated resource costing £20K per year (2 years) to gather the baseline information for the development of Nature Networks.</p> |