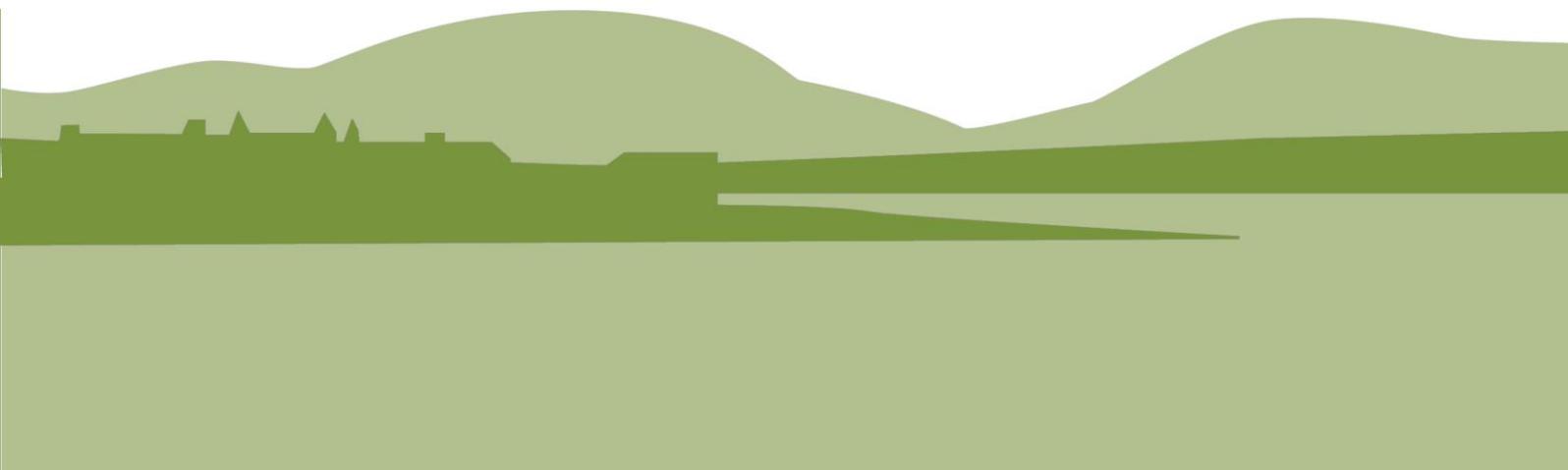


# Orkney Outdoor Access Strategy



**MARCH 2017**



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## Introduction

**The Orkney Outdoor Access Strategy sets out Orkney Islands Council's priorities for the provision of outdoor access in Orkney.**

The Orkney Outdoor Access Strategy was first published in 2006 and was reviewed and updated in 2016 in order to continue the work already begun. It is a strategic document with proposals that will result in an action plan designed to enable delivery and monitor progress.

The Access Strategy provides a framework to guide the development and management of outdoor access throughout the islands. It defines aims and objectives that will help Orkney to develop access in a planned and co-ordinated fashion. The Access Strategy incorporates an action plan, which will translate the strategy's aims into a series of proposals to be examined and discussed with stakeholders with a view to their implementation.

The strategy examines the current provision for access in Orkney and looks at future needs and demands. Using this information the strategy sets out the key issues to be addressed and identifies the priorities for improving outdoor access in Orkney. It also identifies key action areas, such as the coastline and farmland and considers the problems and opportunities associated within these areas. The strategy also identifies a wide range of user groups and seeks to provide access opportunities for people of all ages and abilities.

Local Authorities have statutory responsibilities under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 which came into effect on 9 February 2005. The Act created a statutory right of responsible access over most land and inland water. As a result of this legislation, the Council has nine duties and eleven powers granted in order to pursue and enforce these obligations. This strategy will help to ensure that the Council is able to fulfil its duties under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and delivery wider economic, health and wellbeing benefits for our communities.

## A Vision for Outdoor Access in Orkney

This section provides an overall vision and key aims for the development of outdoor access in Orkney.

**The vision and aims have been developed from the original Access Strategy compiled in 2006 and through consultation with stakeholders with an interest in outdoor access including the Orkney Local Access Forum between 2014-16.**

### A Vision for Outdoor Access in Orkney:

'To promote enjoyment of the outdoors by providing high quality access, that satisfies the needs and aspirations of the local community and visitors to the islands'.

In order to achieve this vision, it is recognised that the efficient targeting of resources will be crucial in order to operate effectively within the constraints of current and future revenue streams.

This vision also complements the “Out There” policy statement by Sports Scotland. It is recognised that the Orkney Outdoor Access Strategy and the “Out There” policy share significant objectives.

## **Key Aims**

The Strategy identifies the following key aims:

- To establish Orkney as a leader in the development, management and promotion of outdoor access in Scotland.
- To support the sustainable development of the tourist industry by helping to establish Orkney as a recognised high quality destination for walking and cycling.
- To provide a co-ordinated, actively promoted and well-maintained network of paths.
- To deliver a joined up approach with all partners working to maximise the economic, health and well-being benefits of outdoor access
- To provide a range of access opportunities suitable for different user groups and people of all abilities which are safe, welcoming and enjoyable.
- To work with land managers to achieve a balance between the needs of those living and working on the land and the needs of access users.
- To ensure that local communities, land managers, access user groups and partner organisations are involved in the management and development of outdoor access in Orkney.
- To promote responsible behaviour in the countryside, through education and information.

## Key Themes for Outdoor Access

### Introduction

This section of the strategy sets out the priorities and guiding principles for outdoor access in Orkney as a whole. A number of key themes have been identified, which reflect the vision and aims of the strategy. These themes are developed in this section by highlighting key issues and outlining proposals which will be carried forward to resolve these issues.

The Key Themes covered in this section are:

- Access for all.
- The path network.
- Information, promotion and education.
- Active living.
- Tourism.
- Working with land managers.
- Heritage, conservation and the environment.
- Maintaining outdoor access infrastructure.

### Access for All

**This strategy aims to provide access opportunities for countryside users of all abilities.**

People enjoy the countryside in many different ways and have different expectations and needs. The strategy needs to consider ramblers undertaking a day long hike, as well as families with young children going for a gentle stroll, or a people with disabilities in a wheelchair. Some people can manage to walk on rough heather and climb over high stiles, while others need smooth paths with seats to rest on. It is therefore important that a wide range of access opportunities are provided, whilst appreciating that not all routes can be suitable for people of all abilities.

This strategy considers the needs of other user groups – not everyone requires foot access - cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers also need opportunities for off road access.

#### Key Issues:

- A need for more opportunities for people of all abilities to enjoy access to the countryside.
- A need to ensure that appropriate path have facilities suitable for disabled users. The path grading system alluded to below will assist in this regard.
- The implementation of a path grading system which will allow those taking access to select routes based upon their wishes and ability.

## **Improving Access for All**

### Next Steps:

#### Proposal 1.

To consult with relevant parties to help identify the access requirements and priorities for disabled and less able people.

#### Proposal 2.

To Implement improvements to existing routes where practical and feasible.

#### Proposal 3.

To develop new access opportunities for disabled and less able people identified in Proposals 1 and 2, where practical and feasible.

#### Proposal 4.

To develop multi-user routes near to settlements, providing links between housing areas, shops, schools, workplaces and amenity areas.

#### Proposal 5

To develop an accessibility policy for the maintenance and development of footpaths and wider access in accordance with best practice.

## The Path Network

### Paths are the key to managing access in Orkney.

The majority of land in Orkney is enclosed farmland, with extensive barbed wire or electric fencing which does not facilitate public access. Coupled with this is the high density of livestock, particularly cattle, which also makes access to many areas difficult. Farmers have valid concerns about public access through fields with livestock, especially if visitors have dogs. While the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives a right of responsible access to enclosed land, both access users and farmers would prefer to see marked routes developed which avoid fields with livestock, or other sensitive areas. A number of access opportunities already exist in Orkney, including paths promoted by the Council and approximately 150 public rights of way. However, consultation with OLAF and wider stakeholders has shown there is an aspiration for more long-range paths, especially coastal routes, circular paths and routes to popular heritage and amenity sites.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 establishes a duty on the Council to develop a Core Paths Network. This is a basic framework of paths which will give the public reasonable access throughout the county. The Core Paths Network includes existing routes, public rights of way and even quiet roads.

#### Key Issues:

- The need to manage access over enclosed farmland to the benefit of land managers and access users.
- A demand for the development of a wellmanaged consolidated Core Paths Network that includes the routes most valued by local communities and visitors.
- OIC has a duty to keep open and free from obstruction existing public rights of way and uphold the right of responsible access created by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.
- The consolidation of the network of core paths in Orkney in order to make it more conducive to the objectives detailed in this document.

#### Next Steps:

##### Proposal 6

The Council, and its wider partners, will work in partnership with land managers to enable path routes that will help reduce conflicts between farming and recreational access.

##### Proposal 7.

The Council will review and prepare an updated Core Paths Plan in consultation with land managers, access users, local communities and other stakeholders. The resulting path network will provide a reduced and better-managed group of higher quality paths. This will enable available funds to be better targeted.

##### Proposal 8.

The Council will continue to investigate public rights of way disputes and take appropriate action where expedient and in the public interest.

Proposal 9.

The Council will provide guidance on developing fit for purpose, safe paths. This will assist land managers who are developing paths, particularly as part of applications to agri-environment schemes administered by the Scottish Government.

Methodology:

Commencing following approval of Orkney Outdoor Access Strategy at Committee on 28 February 2017.

- Qualitative assessment of existing core path network to be undertaken in conjunction with the Orkney Local Access Forum.
- Consultation with Roads Support to consider potential changes to the core path network identified through routine maintenance inspections.
- Assessment of the impact of the Scapa Flow Landscape Partnership Scheme and the potential impact of the North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme.
- Informal consultation with Orkney Local Access Forum.
- Consultation with statutory consultees including Orkney Local Access Forum, Scottish Natural Heritage and bodies representing land management interests.
- Draft of revised core path network to be submitted to Committee for approval.
- **Information, Promotion and Education**

#### **One of the key issues is the need for better information and promotion of paths and wider outdoor access**

Some people are unsure of where they can walk and feel unwelcome and insecure in the countryside. Many routes are not signposted and only a limited number of walks leaflets and maps are generally available. Promotion of routes is vital if people are to enjoy the countryside and use it confidently and without conflict.

It is also crucial that the public use the countryside responsibly. Better understanding of countryside issues and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code can be reached through the provision of information and interpretation.

Raising awareness of the responsibilities of access users and land managers will help to ensure that countryside access takes place without problems or conflict.

These issues have been ameliorated by the work of the various Rangers in Orkney as well as the continued publicity and education around the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

**Key Issues:**

- Paths are inadequately signposted and promoted.
- Information about routes is not readily available.
- The need to promote responsible use of the countryside and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code through awareness raising, advice and education.

**Promoting Outdoor Access**Next Steps:

## Proposal 10.

To ensure that routes included in the Core Paths Plan are adequately signposted and way marked. The review of the core path network and rationalisation will help this to be achieved within funding available.

## Proposal 11.

To ensure that core paths are well promoted through the provision of information using a range of appropriate media. The path grading system will help to publicise levels of accessibility.

## Proposal 12.

To continue to work in partnership with landowners, NGOs, local and central government, funders and local communities to provide the required signposting, interpretation and information.

## Proposal 13.

To continue to work with Scottish Natural Heritage to promote and publicise the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and to ensure access users and land managers are aware of their responsibilities, e.g. closing of gates, keeping paths free from obstruction, proper control of dogs and dog fouling.

## Proposal 14.

To continue to provide information about the responsible use of the countryside using a range of appropriate media.

## Proposal 15.

The continued support of the Ranger Services and land managers in Orkney to provide 'on the ground' advice to local people and visitors.

## Active Living

**It is now widely recognised that lack of exercise is a major contributor towards many health problems including heart disease, obesity and mental well-being.**

The promotion of activities such as walking and cycling is seen as a key means to encourage more people to take exercise. Providing adequate access provision that is suitable for all users and close to where they live is the first step towards encouraging walking, cycling and other modes of active travel.

The Safe Routes to School initiative, which provides off road walkways and cycle ways in towns and villages, encourages children to walk or cycle to school and reduces the use of cars for short journeys.

Providing the infrastructure is only the first step. People also need to be encouraged to go out and walk. Health walk schemes range from group walks led by voluntary walk leaders to leaflets which encourage walking and GP referral schemes. There is a national organisation 'Paths for All' which supports initiatives that stimulate interest in walking. The 'Strollers and Striders' walking group, set up in Stromness by the Health Promotion Officer with the NHS, was funded through this programme.

As stated previously, Sports Scotland have produced the following policy which complements this part of the Orkney Outdoor Access Strategy:

[https://sportscotland.org.uk/documents/resources/outthere\\_final.pdf](https://sportscotland.org.uk/documents/resources/outthere_final.pdf)

### Key Issues:

- The need to increase activity levels in the general population to improve health.
- The need to provide access opportunities which encourage people to walk and cycle.
- The need to stimulate public interest in walking and cycling as a means to improve their health.

### Promoting Healthy Lifestyles

#### Next Steps:

Proposal 16.

To promote outdoor access as a way of encouraging more active lifestyles.

Proposal 17.

To encourage the development of initiatives which stimulate community participation in outdoor access activities and publicise these initiatives widely. An example of this could be local schools sponsoring a path in their catchment area and using both for exercise and educational purposes.

To support initiatives which promote walking and cycling to school, work or local services.

Proposal 18.

To work closely with the NHS to develop walking for health initiatives.

## Improving the tourism offer

**Countryside access has an important role to play in supporting the local tourist economy. Many activities enjoyed by visitors rely on a high quality outdoor access infrastructure and information**

This provision include access to historical sites, access to sites for bird watching and access to popular amenity areas such as beaches and cliffs. Walking is the second most popular activity for visitors and most tourists will walk as part of their holiday.

Tourism is very important for the more remote islands and these communities often see path networks as a useful way of attracting visitors to the islands and encouraging them to stay longer. Promotion of paths and access is obviously a crucial part of developing access for tourists. Visitors can feel unsure about where they can go in the countryside and prefer to use well-signposted, clear routes. The North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme aims to address these issues in the North Isles.

One of the aims of this access strategy is to support the sustainable development of the tourist industry by helping to establish Orkney as a recognised high quality destination for walking and cycling. Wider objectives include supporting the tourism economy by increasing the length of visitor stays, promoting a wider spread of visitors across Orkney and increasing their expenditure.

### Key Issues:

- A need to provide high quality countryside access for visitors.
- A need to improve information about access opportunities for visitors.
- Provision of well-maintained furniture, signage and parking facilities/viewpoints for key routes and sites.

### Developing Access for Tourism

#### Next Steps:

Proposal 19.

Ensure visitors have adequate information about paths and wider outdoor access, through leaflets, interpretation, websites and other materials.

Proposal 20.

Work with local communities to help countryside access contribute to local tourism developments.

Proposal 21.

Develop and/or maintain essential facilities at key countryside sites, such as parking facilities and picnic benches, where appropriate and feasible.

Proposal 22.

To support the existing Ranger Services in Orkney to provide information for visitors on a range of subjects including promoted walks, the access legislation, natural heritage and archaeology.

## Working with Land Managers

**Paths can only be developed with the support of land managers. The extent of the existing paths in Orkney shows how forward thinking local landowners have been with regard to developing managed access.**

However, land managers can have concerns about access rights and how they can affect their work. Issues that concern farmers include dogs not under proper control; people and dogs in fields with livestock; gates being left open and gates being blocked by cars. It is important that land managers concerns are fully appreciated and understood and they are consulted fully in the review and development of the Core Paths Network and wider initiatives. Land managers also need to be aware of their responsibilities under the new access legislation.

The Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) via the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) provides access options for land managers, by offering funding for maintenance of paths, signage and some infrastructure.

### Key Issues:

- The need to reduce conflict between the needs of land managers and access users.
- The need for land managers to be aware of their responsibilities in the SOAC.
- To support land managers in accessing funding sources to improve the management of access on their land. This is particularly relevant whilst the medium to long-term future of such funding is uncertain.

### Access and Land Managers

#### Next Steps:

Proposal 23.

Land managers interests should continue to be represented on the Local Access Forum.

Proposal 24.

Access planning, development and management should take into account the needs, concerns and aspirations of land managers.

Proposal 25.

Land managers and organisations such as the National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS), Scottish Land and Estates (SLE) and the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspectorate Division (SGRPID) should be fully consulted during the review and development of the Core Paths Plan.

Proposal 26.

OIC should provide help and advice to land managers wishing to take up access options under the AECS.

## Heritage, Conservation and the Environment

**Countryside access allows local people and visitors to enjoy the natural, cultural and historical heritage of the islands.**

It is important that development of access is not carried out at the expense of that heritage. Heavy public use of sensitive areas can cause erosion of vegetation, damage to archaeological sites and disturbance to wildlife. Construction works during the bird breeding season could cause birds to abandon their nests.

Access planning and management should conserve and, wherever possible, enhance the natural environment and our cultural heritage.

Countryside access also provides an opportunity to increase understanding and awareness of areas rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage.

### **Key Issues:**

- A need to ensure the development of access does not cause damage to the natural or cultural heritage.
- A need to raise awareness of the natural and cultural heritage where access routes are provided.

### **Access and our Heritage**

#### Next Steps:

Proposal 27.

To manage paths and wider outdoor access taking account of the need to conserve the natural and cultural heritage of the area. Historic Environment Scotland, Orkney Archaeology Society, the County Archaeologist, SNH, RSPB and the Orkney Field Club should be consulted whenever appropriate.

Proposal 28.

Interpretation and other information associated with countryside access should promote increasing awareness of our biodiversity and cultural heritage.

## Maintaining the Access Infrastructure

**The quality of the management and maintenance of the access infrastructure is a key issue. Poorly maintained routes will not be used well and may be unsafe for the public.**

Currently core paths are inspected on a rolling basis by OIC staff. The majority of core path maintenance is carried out during the summer months by OIC appointed contractors and includes grass cutting, treatment of wooden infrastructure and where appropriate, the replacement or refurbishment of furniture on the network. On Site interpretation and other information provision also may also need to be maintained, upgraded or replaced.

The SRDP means that the Council as well as landowners are able to access funds for the improvement of paths. It should be noted that these funds are not available for cyclical maintenance which will continue to be funded from the Council's funds designated for outdoor access.

### Key Issues:

- The need to ensure that core paths are maintained to a high standard.
- The need to ensure that there are sufficient funds available to maintain and repair access infrastructure and upgrade and renew on site furniture, interpretation and signage.
- The review of the core path plan should include the identification of 'high value' paths, considering levels of use and the benefits the paths might provide. This will help to target and prioritise available maintenance funds.

## Providing Well Maintained Paths

### Next Steps:

Proposal 29.

To continue to inspect all promoted countryside access sites and core paths on a regular basis to ensure they are safe and fit for use. Proposal 30.

To continue to maintain and repair all furniture on the core path network.

Proposal 31.

To enable other organisations including development trusts and community councils to take responsibility for the management, maintenance and development of paths within their community.

## Action Areas

**This section of the Strategy provides details of how countryside access will be implemented in the future.**

The following Action Areas have been identified:

- A. Enclosed Farmland.
- B. Coast.
- C. Settlements.
- D. Inland Water.
- E. Areas with Natural Heritage Designations.
- F. Areas with Cultural and Archaeological Designations.
- G. The Orkney Hills.
- H. The Outer Isles.

Under each of the 'action areas' there will be:

- A description of the 'Action Area' in general and more specifically in relation to access.
- A detailed look at the key issues in the 'Action Area'. Priorities for the different actions identified under each area.

## Action Area A: Enclosed Farmland

### Description

**One of the main industries and employers in Orkney is agriculture.**

Many Orkney farms are based on livestock farming. According to the Agricultural Census of June 2015 there were a total of 32,800 cattle in Orkney and 52,966 sheep. A great deal of the enclosed farmland is used for grazing of either sheep or cattle in the summer months. The enclosed areas without stock present are used to grow hay, silage or barley which is fed to the livestock in the winter months. Access to the coastline, beaches, lochs or hills will often involve going through an area of enclosed farmland.

### Key Issues:

The right of responsible access created by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 includes public access over enclosed farmland. Many local land managers have expressed concerns regarding this and key issues are summarised below:

- All access users need to be fully aware of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code guidance with respect to enclosed farmland.
- The need to raise public awareness of issues of particular importance in Orkney e.g. fields with livestock, dogs, silage crops, gates being left open.
- Where appropriate, the need to work with land managers to develop safe routes through fields with livestock or crops.

Access users also have problems with access over enclosed farmland. The key issues for users are:

- They are often unsure where they can safely go, without interfering with land management operations or meeting livestock.
- Access over barbed wire or electric fences can be hazardous and it can be difficult to find a gate to use.
- Farm gates are often difficult to open and close.

### Priorities for Access over Farmland

#### Creating Paths:

- The creation of paths and path networks through enclosed farmland will help to reduce conflict between recreational access users and land management. The main priority is for the Council, and wider partners, to work closely with land managers to manage suitable path routes. This has largely been achieved through the development of a core path network although ongoing work is vital to ensure that the system continues to operate effectively for both landowners and those taking access.

**Encouraging Responsible Access:**

- Responsible access over enclosed land can be encouraged by the use of good signage, information boards and leaflets. These are important tools for developing successful access management. They can be provided by Orkney Islands Council, land managers or local communities.
- Where possible and within budgetary constraints, paths should be clearly signposted at the start of the walk and waymarked as necessary. On site interpretation boards can provide guidance on access users rights and responsibilities. They can also provide information about land management needs and potential hazards or risks.
- The provision of information, and where appropriate signage, about land management operations can help visitors avoid conflict with farming activities.

**Public Rights of Way:**

- There are currently a number of Public Rights of Way (PROWs) that go through enclosed farmland. The Council is committed to ensuring that these routes are kept open and free from obstruction. These PROWs are an important part of Orkney's access provision and form part of the Core Paths Network. It is intended that the review of the core path network will look to provide linkages between PROWs to create a more effective network of routes.

**Providing Car Parks:**

- Parking areas at the start of promoted walks help to prevent people blocking gateways with cars and causing land managers inconvenience. The aspiration to develop new parking provision is very much subject to the availability of appropriate funding as well as landowner agreement. It is not envisaged that funding will be available to purchase land to create car parking areas to help utilise the core path network and PROWs. It is possible that some funding may be available through schemes like the North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme (NILPS).

## Action Area B: The Coast

### Description

**The Orkney coastline consists of a diverse mixture of dramatic cliffs, sandy beaches and rocky shores.**

It provides some of Orkney's most spectacular scenery, beautiful views and important archaeology. The coastline is probably one of Orkney's greatest attractions and is a very important resource for walking.

Cliff top walks are particularly popular in Orkney, at any time of year. During the winter you can see the dramatic rough seas and huge waves breaking onto the cliffs. In summer the cliffs are like natural skyscrapers in a huge seabird city. Narrow ledges on otherwise vertical cliff faces attract thousands of breeding seabirds.

Cliffs are often backed by maritime heath or maritime grassland – both are important natural habitats that support a rich biodiversity. Sandy links or machair is another valuable coastal habitat, colourful with wild flowers in the summer months.

Orkney has a number of lovely sandy beaches which are very popular for recreational activities such as dog walking and picnicking, as well as water based sports.

Orkney's low rocky shores are less dramatic than our cliffs but still attractive areas with abundant seals, rock pools and wading birds. Many of Orkney's cultural sites are located along the coast and also attract a great many walkers. Sites vary from defensive brochs and hermitage sites to boat nousts and tangle dykes.

### Key Issues:

- Fences very close to the edge of the coast can make public access difficult and unsafe.
- Narrow, fenced coastal strips force access users to walk in adjacent fields which may contain livestock or crops.
- Walks along high cliffs may suffer from coastal erosion, landslides and cliff falls. Undermining of cliffs by the sea can result in overhangs which are not visible to walkers on the cliff top.
- Cliff walks may not be suitable for all user groups. Dogs and children can be particularly vulnerable.
- Beaches are popular recreational sites that are often spoilt by litter and dog faeces.
- Popular beaches are not always accessible to less able or disabled people.
- Increased public access may damage natural habitats or disturb breeding birds.
- Protection of coastal cultural sites from damage and erosion.

### Priorities for Coastal Access

#### Developing Coastal Paths:

- The development of new coastal paths is a high priority for both residents and tourists as articulated by OLAF

- There is a clear need for both long linear coastal walks and circular coastal walks, which are signposted and promoted.  
Access to the coast needs to be managed in the interests of appropriate land management, the natural environment and safety.
- Where fences are very close to the edge of the coast, making access difficult and dangerous, OIC should work with land managers to identify areas where fences could be moved back to create a wider coastal strip whilst recognising the financial and administrative implications for land managers.
- Some areas of coastline, including beaches, are made inaccessible by adjacent fenced farmland. To secure appropriate access to these areas, the Council and its partners can work with land managers to create routes across enclosed farmland enabling access to the coast.

#### **Protecting the Natural Heritage:**

- Care should be taken when developing coastal routes to conserve natural habitats and avoid disturbing sensitive breeding birds. Paths should be designed to avoid particularly sensitive areas. Consultation with SNH, RSPB and the Council's Environment Officer will identify vulnerable sites.

#### **Protecting the Cultural Heritage:**

- Care should also be taken to protect the cultural heritage when developing coastal routes. Historic Environment Scotland and the Orkney Archaeology Society should be consulted when developing paths in sensitive areas.

#### **Improving amenity areas:**

- Popular amenity areas, such as beaches, should be pleasant and safe for all recreational users. OIC, the public and other organisations and agencies should continue to support the annual 'Bag the Bruck' and 'Pick up 3 Pieces' schemes. Dog walkers should be made aware of their duty to clean up after their dogs.
- Access to coast including beaches, should be improved where practical, so that these sites are available for less able or disabled people. Provision of parking close to the coast can make beaches more easily accessible for all users.

## Action Area C: Settlements

### Description

**The main settlements in Orkney have their own special issues and priorities for action and have therefore have been grouped together into Action Area C.**

The main settlements in Orkney are Kirkwall, Stromness, Dounby, Finstown and St Margaret's Hope. Kirkwall is by far the largest town in Orkney and according to the 2011 census had a population of 9,293, more than one third of Orkney's total population. Improving access in and around the settlements will therefore be a high priority.

### Key Issues:

- A need to reduce the reliance on cars for short journeys in towns and promote active travel. Many residents in the main settlements use cars to access services, schools, workplaces and amenity sites.
- A need to encourage walking and cycling to improve health and well being
- A need to improve countryside access close to settlements.
- Dog fouling on paths and in recreation areas.
- Litter.

### Priorities for Access in and around Settlements

#### Development of Multi-user Paths:

- To provide good quality, safe multi-user paths, which link settlements to nearby amenity areas. For example the creation of a multi- user route from Kirkwall to Scapa Bay following the route of the burn and avoiding a busy, fast road.

#### Development of Local Path Networks:

- To increase the number of countryside walks that are located close to settlements and to develop simple path networks in and around settlements. The public consultation shows there is a high demand for circular walks which are accessible from housing areas.

### Planning Ahead:

- Ensure that access forms an integral part of new development and regeneration projects. This can be achieved by using development briefs, planning conditions and agreement to ensure that better access is delivered.

## Action Area D: Inland Water

### Description

**Orkney contains large areas of inland water mainly in the form of lochs.**

There are a number of lochs both on the Orkney mainland and in the isles and many of these are popular with trout fishermen. There is also low-level use of lochs by canoes and wind surfers. The lochs and associated wetlands are important sites for wildlife, particularly wintering and breeding birds.

### Key Issues:

- Access to lochs is limited due to the necessity of crossing enclosed farmland to reach the lochside.
- Circular walks around loch shores are restricted by field fences that extend right down to the loch edge. There is often livestock in these fields which use the loch to drink from.
- Loch shores are subject to fluctuating water levels, which could make developing paths difficult.
- There are a limited number of launching points on the lochs. There is a demand for more launching points to be created with good access.
- Orkney lochs are an extremely important habitat for wildlife, especially wintering and breeding wildfowl. Improved access to lochs may increase disturbance of wildlife.

### Priorities for Access to Inland Water

#### Improved Lochside Access

To improve lochside access by working with relevant land managers. This will include access to the loch through enclosed farmland, as well as access around the loch itself.

#### Protecting Wildlife

Lochside paths and boat access should not be created where this would have a serious adverse impact on wildlife. Consultation with SNH, RSPB, Orkney Field Club and the Council's Environment Officer will identify sensitive areas. Bird hides could be provided to enable low impact wildlife observation.

#### Interpretation and Information

By providing good guidance and interpretation at the main entry points to the loch, access users can be informed about the biodiversity interest of the loch and made aware of the need to minimise disturbance of wildlife.

## Action Area E: Areas with Natural Heritage Designations

### Description

**Much of Orkney's land is managed with nature conservation in mind.**

There currently 13 areas which are designated as Special Protected Areas (SPA), six areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and one Ramsar site in Orkney. These are sites of international natural heritage importance, which have been given protection under European law. There are 36 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in Orkney. These sites have been designated because 'they are 'special' for their plants, animals or habitats, their rocks or landforms, or a combination of such natural features'. The SSSIs in Orkney make up an area of 23,644 hectares. This represents almost a quarter of the total area of Orkney. The RSPB manage over 8,000 hectares, with most of this land designated as nature reserves. The RSPB welcomes responsible access, and through careful access management ensures that disturbance to nesting birds is minimised.

Orkney has one Local Nature Reserve, Mull Head in Deerness, owned and managed by Orkney Islands Council. Mull Head is a very popular recreational area, used by residents and tourists. There are also over 240 Local Nature Conservation Sites.

The public are understandably keen to have access to these 'special' areas and enjoy Orkney's biodiversity, but it is important that recreational access is carefully managed with the appropriate protection of these sites taken into account.

### Key Issues:

- Damage and disturbance occurring as a result of increased access to designated sites.
- Disturbance to sensitive wildlife, especially breeding birds, as a result of increased access.
- Damage to sensitive natural habitats and rare plants by walkers, cyclists or horse riders. Heavy public use can lead to erosion of vegetation. Damage can be particularly severe if the ground is wet and boggy.
- Dogs not kept under close control may disturb ground nesting birds and eat eggs and young chicks.

### Priorities for Access to Sites of Natural Heritage Importance

#### Managing Access

Orkney Islands Council will work with SNH land managers and other partners to manage public access, whilst minimising disturbance to wildlife and damage to natural habitats.

#### Interpretation and Information

The provision of detailed guidance and interpretation at the entrance points to a nature reserve or other protected areas can raise awareness of the importance of the natural heritage and the need to conserve it. Maps showing paths can be displayed on interpretation boards or in leaflets, for example, with the routes then clearly waymarked on

the ground. These actions can help manage access and protect the most sensitive areas of the sites.

## Action Area F: Areas with Cultural and Archaeological Designations

### Description

**Orkney has a wealth of sites of cultural heritage interest.**

There are a total of 330 sites which are Scheduled Monuments, ranging from prehistoric times to the 20th Century. In addition to this there are over 2000 sites listed on the Site and Monuments Record and new sites are found every year. The Heart of Neolithic Orkney is recognised as an area of international value through its designation as a World Heritage Site. It includes Skara Brae, Maeshowe, the Stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar, together with adjacent standing stones and burial mounds.

A number of the more important monuments are managed by Historic Environment Scotland or the Council and some are paying facilities. However, many are not staffed and largely unsupervised sites in the wider countryside. It is important that recreational access does not have an adverse impact on these sites, or their settings.

### Key Issues:

- Damage to cultural sites as a result of pressure from increased recreational access.
- Increased erosion of coastal sites resulting from public access.
- Use of metal detectors.
- removal of artefacts or materials from cultural sites
- Lack of guidance/information on responsible access at cultural sites.

### Priorities for Access to Cultural Sites

#### Managing Access

Orkney Islands Council will work with Historic Environment Scotland, Orkney Archaeological Trust and the County Archaeologist to identify routes which will provide adequate public access, while minimising damage to our cultural heritage.

OIC will continue to work with Historic Environment Scotland, SNH and the RSPB on access within the World Heritage Site.

The Council will also monitor paths where increased use may cause erosion and possible damage to a site.

#### Education

Raising awareness of our cultural heritage will help people to enjoy cultural sites and realise the importance of conserving them. Providing information about individual sites, through leaflets and interpretation, will promote understanding and appreciation of our local history and also encourage the public to treat cultural heritage with respect. The SOAC gives guidance on responsible behaviour at cultural sites and this information should be made widely available. It focuses on not damaging structures or features, not removing anything from the site or using metal detectors and not lighting fires or camping on sites.

## Action Area G: The Orkney Hills

### Description

**Orkney is generally a land of low rolling hills, mostly cultivated, with the tops of the higher hills still covered in moorland.**

Only Hoy has extensive unfenced, open hill ground which is more 'Highland' in nature. The dramatic summits of Ward Hill and Cuilags stand in sharp contrast to the gentle slopes of most of the area. The summit of Ward Hill is only 479m, but the northerly latitude and exposure to winds means the vegetation here is more reminiscent of the Cairngorms. The moorland on Hoy extends to about 9000ha, most of it protected through SPA, SAC and SSSI.

The West Mainland has the second largest block of moorland, mostly lying in the parishes of Harray, Birsay and Rendall. From the hills of Harray you can look across to Rousay which has the third largest area of moorland, with hilltops rising to 250m. Other hill ground can be seen in Eday, Orphir, Stenness and on Keelylang and Wideford Hills. Nearly all Orkney's moorland clad hills are protected by natural heritage designations.

### Key Issues:

- Moorland sites are important for wildlife and plants and increased public access may cause damage and disturbance.
- The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives freedom of access to hill ground and access users need to be aware of their responsibilities when exercising their access right.
- Moorland can be at risk from campers lighting open fires which are not kept under control.
- Hill ground may be grazed by sheep which could be disturbed by dogs running loose.
- Upland areas are general more challenging for walking and caution needs to be exercised to ensure that access is taken safely.

### Protecting the Natural Heritage

As described in the Action Area E, it is important that public access is carefully managed in sensitive and vulnerable areas and people are well informed about nature conservation issues and the biodiversity of the area.

### Protecting the Cultural Heritage

Many of our cultural sites occur on hill ground. Care should be taken to protect these sites by managing access in sensitive areas and raising awareness of the cultural interest.

### Enjoying Wider Access

Hill ground is the one area of Orkney where access users can enjoy the freedom to roam more widely, rather than being restricted to paths. Except where there are peat tracks which can be used to create formal routes, access over hill ground can be less managed than in other areas. There are, however, issues which may need to be resolved by erecting way

marking to guide walkers. These include dangerous hazards and the need to protect sensitive wildlife or natural habitats.

### **Guidance for Access Users**

Freedom of access to hills should be accompanied by clear guidance on access users responsibilities and safety. Provision of interpretation, leaflets and other information will help people to access hills safely and responsibly. Subjects covered should include protecting the natural and cultural heritage, the risk of fire, keeping dogs under control and being prepared by carrying suitable clothing, map and compass.

## Action Area H: The Outer Isles

### Description

**Sustaining remote communities in Orkney, particularly in the smaller isles, can only be achieved with a viable economic base.**

Many of our remoter islands communities have more limited economic opportunities and economic disadvantages of remoteness,

The North and unlinked South Isles are regarded as particularly fragile. One way forward for these communities is to develop sustainable tourism. Part of this is the need to develop facilities and activities on the islands that attract tourists and encourage them to stay on the isles rather than just come for a day visit.

The outer isles are mostly fairly small with extensive attractive coastlines and quiet roads which are ideal for recreational access. They have abundant wildlife and cultural sites for visitors to explore on foot or by cycle. The provision of improved outdoor access opportunities could boost tourism and aid the local economy.

A key part of the strategy will be engagement with and input to the North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme (NILPS). Outdoor access is a vital element of this scheme and it is envisaged that it will help deliver the Council's aspirations for access on the north isles.

Proposal 32. Creation of a network of heritage trails across the North Isles.

### Key Issues:

- The need to promote sustainable tourism on the outer isles.
- The need to develop outdoor access opportunities to help promote tourism.
- Engagement with the North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme (NILPS).

### Priorities for Access on the Outer Isles

#### Developing Outdoor Access Opportunities

A wide range of access opportunities should be provided. The development of 'whole island' coastal paths is possible on the smaller islands. Coastal walks, with tracks linking to the island's road system to create a network of routes of different lengths, would be ideal. It is also important to have paths close to the ferry terminals and airports to reduce the need for visitors to bring their cars.

Easy access should be provided to important amenity sites, such as beaches, and to sites of historical or cultural interest. The key sites on the island should be accessible for visitors of all abilities, wherever feasible and practical.

#### Information for Visitors

Publicity is the key to attracting tourists to the outer isles. In relation to access provision this means providing walking and cycling information in the tourist information centres, on the Council website, at the airport and on the ferries.

Once visitors reach the isles there should be access literature available in hotels, bed and breakfasts, ferry waiting rooms, shops and other public places. On site interpretation and

signage is also crucial to providing a good experience for visitors and to ensure they exercise their access rights responsibly.

## Delivery Mechanisms

**An essential part of the strategy is to identify the mechanisms by which Orkney Islands Council and its partners can implement the key objectives and actions highlighted in the strategy.**

**The core mechanisms for access development are as follows:**

- Staffing provision.
- Local Access Forum.
- Partnership Working.
- Resources.
- Monitoring and evaluation.

### Staffing Provision

Orkney Islands Council employs an Access Officer to co-ordinate the implementation of outdoor access in Orkney. The Access Officer is employed on a temporary contract up to the end of March 2017. The Access Officer's work focuses primarily on regulatory aspects and promoting responsible access in terms of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and rights of way. The Access Officer is also responsible for strategic matters relating to access and rights of way such as the review of this document and the impending review of the core path network on Orkney and delivering the visions and aspirations of this strategy.

### Local Access Forum

The Orkney Local Access Forum (LAF) was established in 2001. This role was taken on by a pre-existing group, the Orkney Countryside Committee. In order to act as the LAF the Countryside Committee was expanded to include additional groups, thus ensuring that all relevant stakeholders were included.

The role of the LAF is to advise OIC on the implementation of the new access legislation. Its core tasks are:

- To review local implementation of the new access legislation and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
- To assist OIC in developing an access strategy.
- To assist in the review of the Core Path Network and wider access provision including rights of way.
- To work with OIC to develop local advice for the public and land managers on their responsibilities.
- To act as a formal consultee on issues such as diversion and closure of paths.
- To advise on the resolution of access disputes.
- To advise OIC on the implementation of its access duties.

It is intended that the membership of OLAF will be reviewed in 2016/2017. The purpose of this review will be establish two tiers of membership as follows:

1. Working membership for those individuals and organisations that wish to be actively involved in the work of OLAF.
2. Consultative membership for people or organisations who wish to be kept informed of the business of OLAF but do not want or need to be actively involved in its work.

### **Partnership Working**

It is crucial that the development of access provision is taken forward through partnership working. Countryside access is about more than providing footpaths It also has a role in improving health, providing sustainable transport options, promoting tourism and protecting our heritage. In view of this it is essential that a wide range of partners are involved in its development. Partners should include agencies and organisations such as SNH, NHS, Orkney Enterprise, Historic Environment Scotland, SGRPID, SNFU, Scottish Land and Estates, Ramblers, Visit Orkney and the Orkney Field Club.

The Local Access Forum obviously has a key role to play, with members as wide ranging as the Orkney Ramblers, Orkney Field Club, the SWRI and the local riding clubs. There is also a clear need to draw on a wider range of stakeholders to ensure countryside access reflects the aspirations of all sectors of the community.

Working with land managers is essential to the production of the reviewed Core Paths Plan and to the management of access in general. Farmers and landowners should be well represented on the Local Access Forum but listened to as individuals as well. Many communities in Orkney are already involved in access planning, development and management. This can be through groups such as Development Trusts, Tourist Associations or Community Councils. It is critical this sort of involvement is encouraged to ensure that appropriate access provision is developed.

### **Resources**

The Access Officer will prepare an action plan with partners to identify a programme of initiatives that will improve outdoor access provision and management in Orkney. This action plan will be supported by identified funding streams, such as the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and LEADER, to support implementation. The revenue implications of initiatives taken forward through the action plan will be assessed and any ongoing maintenance burdens identified. It is anticipated that responsibility for maintenance of any new or improved assets will be shared between the Council and strategy partners. Approval of the action plan and any ongoing revenue implications will be sought from the Council and partners in 2017.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Implementation of the reviewed Outdoor Access Strategy must be monitored and evaluated. This will ensure the aims and objectives are adhered to, progress is assessed and problems identified and rectified. It is recommended the strategy continues to be reviewed every five years and that the Local Access Forum should be involved in this process.

Much of the monitoring will be done by establishing a Geographic Information System (GIS) database, into which data could be inputted and easily updated, to create an integrated path management system. This will make it easier to see how access in different areas is developing and being managed and how paths are linking into effective networks. It could also be used to monitor the impact of access on biodiversity. It is likely to be particularly useful for monitoring the development and implementation of the revised Core Paths Plan. The development and implementation of the revised Core Paths Plan will also be monitored by the Scottish Government.

