

**Report to**  
**Southern Uplands Partnership**

**TOWARDS A  
NORTH SOLWAY COASTAL WAY**

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

Development of a coastal path along the North Solway coast has been mooted for many years. Dumfries and Galloway was identified as one of the outstanding sections – in every sense - during discussions about the feasibility of establishing a continuous mainland Scotland coastal route from Gretna to Berwick. It is the missing link between coastal routes in Ayrshire and Cumbria, and with appropriate promotion, offers the opportunity for visitors and residents alike to experience the region's spectacular coastline, whilst simultaneously generating economic, health and environmental benefits. At least part of the route exists already but hitherto, work to identify and address the gaps, develop and promote a route has been limited by constrained resources and lack of any single organisation willing or able to take on the challenge.

In November 2011, a joint meeting between Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP) and Dumfries and Galloway Council (DGC) identified potential for a multi-party approach to route development. With the benefit of funding from SNH, a short contract was advertised to research and document options for development and promotion of a mainly off-road route along or close to the North Solway coast. Detailed route survey was neither practical nor feasible within the limited budget and restricted timeframe. The aim of the study was rather to review issues and opportunities relating to route development, both physically and in terms of implementation and funding options. Following competitive tender, the contract was awarded to Vyv Wood-Gee, a freelance Countryside Management Consultant based in Dumfries and Galloway.

The report which follows summarises the conclusions of consultations with existing and potential stakeholders, considers scope to promote and link existing paths and tracks, identifies work required to address gaps and current restrictions on route development, and sets out implementation options. A list of individuals and organisations consulted in the course of the study is included as Appendix A.

## **2. CONTEXT FOR ROUTE DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 National context**

#### **2.1.1 Scottish Coastal Way Development**

Wikipedia suggests that there is a “national coastal path around the coast of the Scottish mainland”, but although some coastal paths already exist - including coastal paths in Fife, Ayrshire, Berwickshire, Aberdeenshire and Moray, and around the Kintyre and Cowal peninsulas – the concept of a continuous path around the coast is aspirational rather than actual. Elsewhere “virtual” paths have been developed which are not waymarked on the ground and have not involved any capital improvement, such as the Cape Wrath Trail. The real issue in developing a complete Scottish Coastal Way was (and remains) how to fill the gaps.

Prompted by ministerial interest in establishment and promotion of a coastal path around the entire Scottish mainland, in November 2009 SNH hosted a conference involving local authorities and other interested parties to explore potential ways forward. It was agreed that development of a “Scottish Coastal Way” offered potential to contribute to a range of Scottish Government’s strategic priorities for enjoying our cultural and natural heritage, health and wellbeing, promoting tourism, and supporting stronger communities and local economies.

South of the border, commitment to development of a single long distance coastal path is enshrined in law. Natural England has received significant government funding to help co-ordinate creation of the route to rigorous standards, in conjunction with access authorities. In contrast, in Scotland government enthusiasm for a coastal path has not been matched by funding commitment, and a different approach has therefore been required.

SNH’s aim was to develop a comprehensive approach to promoting all of Scotland’s coastal paths and routes under one umbrella through provision of information, consolidation and improvement of existing paths, and longer-term development of new opportunities. Proposals were produced for three pilot areas (Angus, West Dunbartonshire, and Caithness and Sutherland), but in early 2012 SNH concluded that resource shortages and strong political focus on developing the Central Scotland Green Network necessitated a less hands-on approach to coastal route development. The vision of a complete coastal route around Scotland still exists, but there is no specific initiative or funding to develop the route or sections of it. Further development of the Scotland’s Great Trails (SGT) network is being used where possible, coupled with ad hoc initiatives (such as this study in Dumfries and Galloway) exploring scope to link and better promote existing paths and tracks along or close to the coast.

The website for “Scotland’s coastal path” ([www.nationalcoastpath.co.uk](http://www.nationalcoastpath.co.uk)), which also claims the name Scottish Coastal Way, was established to promote the idea and development of a continuous coastal route. It includes links to existing formally recognised long distance coastal paths around parts of Scotland, sectional maps which purport to provide a route for the remainder, and a blog of someone who has walked the entire length of the coast and subsequently established the website. Although sound in principle, the suggested “route” does not necessarily correlate to other maps, or what exists on the ground. For example, the route between Dumfries and Annan does not appear to follow any existing path, road, or even the shoreline.

#### **2.1.2 SNH perspective**

Development of a long distance coastal route ties in with various SNH strategic priorities, and falls within two of the nine business management programmes identified in SNH’s

current corporate plan. Nature and landscape are recognised as making a strong contribution to tourism and the economy, and SNH is also keen to enable people living near the coast to understand and make the most of their local environment. Although SNH is reducing spend on creation of new regional and local paths, development and promotion of SGTs is one of the identified measures of success under the People, Place and Landscape programme. SNH would therefore encourage development of a new coastal route to meet the necessary standards to become part of the branded SGT network (see section 3). Nature based tourism (NBT) is one of the measures of success for the Economic and Social Development programme, hence SNH would be keen to see scope for NBT maximised in relation to route development.

## **2.2 Regional context**

### **2.2.1 Dumfries and Galloway Regional Economic Strategy Action Plan**

This regional plan sets out DGC's commitment to the development of "an innovative and sustainable rural economy that rewards residents with an outstanding quality of life and investors with a stimulating business environment." Development of a long distance coastal potentially has an important role to play in all respects.

### **2.2.2 Dumfries and Galloway Outdoor Access Strategy 2012-17**

Open Outdoors, the Dumfries and Galloway Outdoor Access Strategy approved by DGC in March 2012, provides a vision for outdoor access and the strategic framework for planning, managing and developing access in Dumfries and Galloway. The strategy states that one of its key functions is to increase the diversity of walking opportunities in Dumfries and Galloway, and confirms commitment to enhancing the quality and diversity of walking experiences across Dumfries and Galloway.

The strategy confirms DGC's commitment to continuing to support two long distance routes – Southern Upland Way and the Annandale Way. It makes no reference to development of a long distance coastal path because this is not recognised by DGC as a priority. Consultations undertaken as part of the strategy ranked coastal access as high on the priority list but long distance routes very low, which DGC believe partly reflects negative perceptions and experience of the Southern Upland Way.

### **2.2.3 Core Path Plan**

The vision of the draft core path plan produced by DGC is to provide "safe and well maintained access that increases the health and recreational opportunities of local residents; inviting and well promoted routes which encourage visitors to Dumfries and Galloway and a relationship of mutual respect between access takers and land managers based on responsible behaviour." Development and implementation of the core path plan is the main focus for DGC's access staff and resources, and likely to remain the dominant priority for the next few years. Recognition of routes as core paths is of key significance to potential development of a coastal path in that many funding agencies favour work on core paths over access development, and although there is no maintenance obligation on access authorities, DGC's commitment to providing high quality paths and infrastructure is concentrated very much on key core path routes.

### **2.2.4 Dumfries and Galloway Regional Tourism Strategy 2011-2016**

Tourism is vital to the Dumfries and Galloway economy, in the top three employment sectors, and a key sector which DGC and its partners will continue to support in its growth and diversification. The national "ambition" is to grow the value of Scottish tourism by 50% between 2006 and 2015, equating to an annual 4% growth rate. The value of tourism in the region increased 19% between 2006 and 2009, and the ambition is to achieve an annual

£340 million into the local economy by 2015. The tourism strategy's vision is to establish Dumfries and Galloway as a world class destination in which our visitors receive a superb quality of service and where our products and services exceed visitors' expectations.

### 2.2.5 Proposed Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve

Decision is currently awaited on the proposal which has been submitted to UNESCO for designation of the majority of Galloway and parts of South and East Ayrshire as a new biosphere reserve, an international accolade demonstrating how nature conservation and environmentally sustainable development go hand in hand. The Galloway coast between Glenluce and Kirkcudbright falls within the transitional area which would provide the focus for sustainable development, which might logically include development of a continuous coastal path which links to the Ayrshire Coastal Path.

## **2.3 Relevant projects and initiatives**

The following is not intended as a comprehensive list of relevant projects and initiatives, but presents a summary selection of some of those consulted in the course of the study and their response to suggestion of development of a North Solway Coastal Path.

### 2.3.1 Caerlaverock Community Council

Caerlaverock and surrounding villages have a very pro-active community council who are acutely aware of the importance of tourism to the local economy and are directly involved in tourism development, for example purchase of two former phone boxes and conversion into tourism information points. The community council is very much in support of outdoor activity, and the development of a long distance route, but does not necessarily see itself taking an active or hands-on role in relation to access development.

*"People come here for activity holidays, not guaranteed sunshine. Development of a long distance coastal path can only help attract more people and improve paths for local residents too. Lots of people walk to Glencaple to pick up their paper, so development of any off-road links are of benefit to local people as well as visitors."*

### 2.3.2 Colvend Community Council

The section of coast between Sandyhills and Kippford is one of the most popular coastal walks in south-west Scotland, and a very high proportion of visitors to Colvend and surrounding area are walkers and cyclists. The community council is in favour of anything which can be done to attract more tourists, which in turn will help keep the local shop open and bus services running. Development of a long distance coastal path is seen as wholly beneficial to the local economy and population, particularly if it helps improve existing paths and establish missing links.

### 2.3.3 Destination Dumfries and Galloway

Destination Dumfries and Galloway (DDG)'s mission is to represent, develop and promote Dumfries and Galloway's Tourist Industry. As part of their LEADER funded project, DDG are currently working on a project to revitalise and promote the pre-existing but much under-publicised Solway Coast Heritage Trail. This road-based trail linking Annan and the Rhins of Galloway was established by Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board in 1987. In 2007/8, Solway Heritage produced two booklets to promote coastal landscape and wildlife, and seafood and wildlife. to highlight the natural and cultural heritage of the Solway Coast. The route is waymarked east to west, and was previously promoted via two brochures. DDG are hoping to develop either a new leaflet or an app, reinforcing links with communities along the route. Development and promotion of a coastal walking route around Dumfries and Galloway is considered by DDG to be entirely complementary to both the Solway Coast Heritage Trail and other DDG initiatives.

#### 2.3.4 Gatehouse Development Initiative

Gatehouse Development Initiative is a voluntary charity whose role is to identify, pursue and implement things which the people of Gatehouse of Fleet would like to see done. This includes paths, the importance of which is recognised for local people and visitors for recreation, and as a means of getting from one place to another. The Initiative is already involved through the Fleet Valley National Scenic Area volunteers in path maintenance projects, and has been involved in past development and creation of paths in Cally Woods. Tourism is critical to the local economy, local shops providing goods and services for local people throughout the year would not survive without the swell in trade during the summer from visitors. As competition increases between visitor destinations, Gatehouse is concerned to improve its product and is very much aware of the benefits of environmental enhancement (including improved access opportunities) for local people and visitors. On balance the Initiative is in favour of development of a long distance coastal path on the basis that it would provide increased opportunities and incentive for people to explore the area, and encourage people to return to the area to walk the route in sections. The Initiative would be keen to be involved in future route promotion but sees its short term role as being more consultative rather than involved in route construction. The Initiative does not have access to funding.

#### 2.3.5 Making the Most of the Coast

Solway Firth Partnership has secured LEADER funding towards a £200k two-year partnership project which aims to increase appreciation and understanding of the rich resources which the Solway Coast offers, and to encourage people to care for the coast and improve certain management aspects such as addressing the causes and impacts of marine and coastal litter. The project will be delivered by a coastal ranger who will work with local community groups, schools, businesses and the wider population of Dumfries and Galloway. Activities will include supported beach cleans, production of a Solway Heritage Coast Trail good beach guide, commissioning appropriate environmental art, developing World Oceans Week events programme, working with local schools to support marine and coastal themed education, and encouraging and supporting local voluntary groups to carry out tasks which improve the visual appeal, amenity and safety of the coast for people or enhance coastal wildlife habitat. The project also aims to lead a series of guided coastal walks and educational activities tailored to a range of audiences including local residents, visitors, community, rehabilitation and recovery groups. Overall the project will promote and improve the Dumfries and Galloway coastline, and is entirely complementary to development of a long distance coastal path, although it does not include any physical path improvement or establishment work.

#### 2.3.6 Loch Ryan Coastal Path and Mull of Galloway Route

Having successfully initiated and co-ordinated development of the Ayrshire Coastal Way, in 2007 Ayr Rotary Club challenged the chairman of Stranraer Rotary Club to “pick up the baton” and develop a continuation route south from Glenapp to Stranraer in celebration of the Rotary Club centenary. £33k funding was secured from SNH, Entrust (through Solway Heritage for Dumfries and Galloway), Lendal Trust (landfill funder for Ayrshire), on top of which volunteers contributed £10k of their time surveying, negotiating and implementing the route. A retired roads engineer provided valuable advice on route alignment and helped produce detailed specifications which formed the basis of tender documentation for hired contractors. A retired art teacher, also a member of Stranraer Rotary Club, designed a logo and waymark disk. 10 panels were erected providing information about local history, researched by a Rotary Club member with a keen interest in local history. The resultant 11 mile Loch Ryan Coastal Path was officially opened in August 2009, and has since been widely publicised through a leaflet distributed by the Rotary Club to TICs, hotels and all accommodation in the area. It is estimated that over 2,000 walkers used the route in the first year. Stranraer Rotary Club agreed to SNH grant conditions which stipulated that they maintain the route for a minimum of 5 years in Wigtownshire and 10 years in Ayrshire (where

a higher rate of grant was secured). Members of the group walk the route at least twice per annum to inspect facilities, surfacing and waymarking, and report back any problems such as gate catches requiring adjustment, which are then undertaken by other members of the Rotary Club.

Inspired by the success of the Loch Ryan Coastal Path, and goaded on by Ayr Rotary Club, Stranraer Rotary Club are currently working on implementation of a 24 mile route linking Stranraer to the Mull of Galloway down the east side of the Rhins. The route has been developed in similar fashion to previously. 50% of the estimated cost of £75k has come from LEADER on the basis of providing opportunities for healthy exercise (LEADER advised this was more likely to attract support than economic development). Matched funding has been obtained to the tune of £10k from Awards for All, £7k from the Robertson Trust and the remainder from Stranraer and District Local History Trust (of which the Rotary Club chairman is treasurer), specifically for provision of on-site information panels. DGC Area Committee are not providing direct funding, but agreed to underwrite the project to £6k should costs over-run. Local community councils have confirmed their support in writing but are not directly involved financially or otherwise. The route is scheduled to open in July, and together with the Loch Ryan, Ayrshire Coastal Path and routes currently under development by Gourrock and Milngavie Rotary Clubs, has been recognised as part of the International Appalachian Trail.

#### 2.3.7 Whithorn Trust

Whithorn Trust's key aim is to promote the profile of Whithorn, including development of pilgrimage routes linking Whithorn to Glasgow and Edinburgh. The Trust is keen to develop Whithorn as the natural hub from which to access the Machars, but the lack of off-road paths and tracks leading to/from Whithorn has been identified as one of several constraints limiting how many people visit the area. The Trust is also keen to develop links between communities for both local residents and visitors, but path development has to date been constrained by livestock grazing issues such as bulls in fields. Projects with which Whithorn Trust is involved of relevance to the coastal path are:

- HLF funded project training volunteers to survey archaeological sites on the Machars which it is hoped will then form the basis for future development of themed heritage trails exploring the history of the area, which it is hoped to develop through the proposed Landscape Partnership bid. Funding for the current HLF project finishes at the end of May, although volunteers will continue working on the project thereafter.
- Proposals for development of the Saints and Sinners route.
- Resurrection / development of the vehicular Solway Coast Heritage Trail in conjunction with Destination Dumfries and Galloway (£7k has been identified to be spent by June 2012, database being produced as precursor to developing an app and downloadable trail). The aim is to flag up to visitors what is accessible and available directly off the trail – which might include short and longer distance walks.
- Development and promotion of a cycle route linking Glenluce Abbey to Whithorn, for which a leaflet is going to be produced shortly. Longer-term it is hoped to link this route to the train station at Barrhill

#### 2.4 English Coastal Path development

The existing coastal path around Cumbria, the Cumbria Coastal Way, was developed and opened in the early 1990s, based at least 50% on permissive path agreements. As various walkers have commented on the internet, "Anyone expecting to walk entirely along the coast will be disappointed, as the route meanders inland for substantial sections." Sections around Sellafield have been closed for the past six years, and the route is no longer promoted by Cumbria County Council. No monitoring of route usage has ever been undertaken.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 established a legal right of access around all of England's open coast, including where appropriate "spreading room" along the way where they can rest, relax or admire the view. The new rights are not yet in force, but are being implemented through development of a new coastal path right around England, co-ordinated by Natural England. Access authority staff are responsible for identifying, negotiating, establishing and asserting the route. Sections are being developed sequentially, one of the first being Allonby to Whitehaven on the West Cumbria coast, progressing 90 km either north or south of that in successive years. The section north to the border may use part of the existing Cumbria Coastal Way, but it is hoped to establish a route closer to the sea for most of the way, for example around the floodbank west of Rockcliffe Marsh instead of diverting inland. However, it may be some years before this northerly section is complete.

Simultaneously with development of the English coastal path, the North West Coastal Trail is in course of development, linking Chester to Carlisle. This 1400 km multi-use route initiated by the North West Coastal Forum aims to create a major economic attraction by linking together existing coastal trails and improving access where necessary. There is currently no fixed timetable for route development, which is being done on a "bottom up" basis involving a wide range of national, regional and local partners, funders, businesses, communities, user groups, volunteers and other stakeholders.



## **3. CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENT OF LONG DISTANCE ROUTES**

### **3.1 Criteria for successful development of long distance routes**

Research into experience of long distance routes both in the UK and around the world has identified the following criteria common to successful long distance routes:

- Easily accessible start and finish points, preferably accessible by public transport.
- Challenge without being over-daunting.
- Change in scenery or character at least every half-day.
- Accommodation and services spaced at regular intervals along the route, matched to route users' needs (e.g. overnight accommodation every 10-15 miles minimum. Ideally food available inbetween).
- Minimum length on hard tarmac road.
- Clear signage and waymarking.
- Routes achievable within 4-5 days are in the UK more popular than those which take several weeks to complete.
- Scope to complete the route in different sections, sometimes over a number of years.

### **3.2 Scotland's Great Trails**

For a long distance route to be included in the SGT branded network, it should:

- Be a continuous, clearly identifiable and appropriate waymarked route between defined start and end points (or defined access points in the case of circular routes)
- Be largely off-road (generally no more than 20-30% on road);
- Be at least 40 km /25 miles and have potential for multi-day journeys by foot, bike and/or horse, or canoe;
- Offer at least a basic range of visitor services, with information on the route, facilities and services available to users in appropriate formats;
- Offer opportunities to appreciate the natural, cultural and historic interest in the area through which it passes;
- Be designed, maintained and managed with user experience as a key consideration.

### **3.3 Key principles**

There are no national guidelines or prescriptive specifications for the proposed Scottish Coastal Way. In addition to the above, the following key principles have been used as the basis for route identification in the following section.

- Existing paths and tracks will be used wherever possible. Paths proposed for inclusion in the regional core path plan will usually be the first choice.
- Sections of route along the shoreline may be included even where there is no formally recognisable path (as on other coastal paths such as Fife and Ayr Coastal Way). Ideally these sections should be accessible even at high tide. Route promotion should identify sections where this is not the case, together with high tide alternatives.
- Elsewhere (i.e. other than on core paths or along the shoreline) the route should follow a clearly defined path or track wherever possible, although there is no presumption of surfacing. Well drained, beaten earth is in many circumstances favourable to a formally surfaced path, provided it is capable of withstanding anticipated level and types of use.
- Scope to link sections by public transport where there is no off-road alternative at present is useful, but not a substitute for a continuous coastal route.

## **4. PHYSICAL ROUTE**

### **4.1 Start point**

The proposed start point is the national border at Gretna. Logically, a North Solway coastal route would link directly with the English coastal path. The existing Cumbria Coastal Way terminates at the River Esk. There are no plans to develop or promote a route to fill the gap between the River Esk and the England/Scotland border at the River Sark, nor is there any off-road right of way across this stretch, but following opening of the “Cumbrian Gap” motorway extension between Carlisle and Gretna, walkers, cyclists and horse riders now have option to use the old service road which runs parallel to the motorway from Metal Bridge to Gretna.

“Touchstone” markers at the beginning and end of long distance routes are very popular, and arguably even more important at the start (or finish) of a Scottish Coastal Way at Gretna. If and when the Gretna Landmark project goes ahead, it might provide a good starting point for the North Solway Coastal Way. Alternatively some other marker at the start of the route would be recommended, at the very least an information panel.

### **4.2 Finish point**

The study brief stipulated Cairnryan as the finish point, which as the main ferry port linking across to Northern Ireland is an important hub, although the boundary between Dumfries and Galloway and South Ayrshire is equally relevant.

### **4.3 Mapped route**

The appended sectional Ordnance Survey map extracts (GIS mapped at 1:50k scale) summarise the proposed route, based on information provided during consultations or readily available from local knowledge or past experience. Electronic copies of the sectional maps, and an overview map of the whole route, have been provided to facilitate zooming in to view at larger scale.

Route sections have been categorised as follows:

Proposed core paths	Paths relevant to the proposed long distance coastal route which are included in the latest version of the draft core path plan. This includes some paths which do not currently exist on the ground (such as on the Rhins) but which DGC is committed to developing. DGC is also committed to bringing all of agreed core paths up to a “usable” standard within the next two years, and has allocated requisite resources with which to do so. Hence the anticipation is that no further capital work would be required on these sections of path, other than signage and waymarking as part of the overall route.
Mull of Galloway route	Currently under development by Stranraer Rotary Club, including landowner negotiation and capital improvement work, which it is therefore anticipated would not require significant further improvement.
Existing tracks, LMCs, aspirational core paths	Farm tracks, established paths or other routes which already exist on the ground and over which there is an undisputed right of public access but which are not currently proposed as core paths (some were included as aspirational core paths). This

category includes some paths (e.g. between Rascarrel and port Mary) currently promoted or managed under Land Management Contract (LMC). These sections have not been surveyed, but map research suggests there should not be major problems with inclusion in a long distance coastal route, but would require negotiation with landowners and potentially capital improvement work such as installation of appropriate gates or other access facilities.

Public road	Sections of proposed route on public road, wherever possible on quiet roads with grass verge allowing space to step out of the way of traffic, or where there is adequate pavement along short sections of busier road.
Coastal access	Sections of shoreline where there is not necessarily a fixed path but which are usually accessible even at high tide, which are of a similar standard to shoreline stretches on other promoted coastal paths (such as Ayrshire Coastal Way and Fife Coastal Path)
Agreed route across MOD Land	The agreed path across Dundrennan Ranges, near Kirkcudbright, and along the beach at West Frew (Luce Sands), are subject to intermittent closure during live firing operations. Alternative routes on public road or proposed core paths are shown for use when these routes are closed.
Potential alternative route subject to negotiation and/or funding	Mapped paths, tracks or desire lines which do not necessarily exist on the ground at present but which might potentially be negotiated or developed, subject to funding and/or land manager agreement. Some of these sections of route would require establishment of new links, construction of bridges or other such work to enable inclusion within the coastal path, with capital cost implications.
Busy main road missing sections	Key section(s) of busy main road where there is no pavement or facility to get off the road to avoid traffic, and no obvious or easily negotiated off-road alternative

#### **4.4 Summary statistics**

Category of access	Approximate length (km)	Approximate % of overall route
Proposed core path	271.64	54.2%
Route under development by Stranraer Rotary Club (excluding core path sections)	16.53	3.3%
Shoreline or coastal access (accessible even at high tide)	29.1	5.8%
Public road (quiet/with pavement)	97.2	19.4%
Agreed access across or around MOD land subject to intermittent closure	16.4	3.3%
<b>Total path/route already in existence or in course of development on which it is anticipated no further capital work required other than signage</b>	430.87	85.96%

<b>or waymarking</b> (inc. all above categories)		
Existing tracks, LMCs, aspirational core paths with established access but which may require capital improvement	24.0	4.8%
<b>Total path/route for which no real problems anticipated, including all above categories</b>	<b>454.87</b>	<b>90.75%</b>
Busy main road/missing sections where off-road route needs negotiating and capital improvement required	46.35	9.25%
<b>Approximate total length</b>	<b>501.22</b>	<b>100%</b>
Potential/alternative route which would reduce proportion on road, subject to negotiation and/or funding	5.5	
Alternative route (core path or road) during live firing on MOD land or if access cannot be agreed around shoreline of MOD land at Eastriggs	26.9	

#### **4.5 Key gaps and physical restrictions on route development**

The current physical gaps in coastal access provision around the North Solway are summarised in the table below.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Limitations in terms of development or promotion of long distance coastal route</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
<b>Annandale</b>		
West of Gretna – Stormont to Redkirk Point	Lack of bridge at mouth of Kirtle Water forces walkers to divert inland on quiet lane over public road bridge. Involves extra distance on road but no real issue in terms of LDR.	New paths and bridge included in draft core path plan. After spending considerable time and effort negotiating required access and spec'ing bridge, DGC abandoned proposals due to flood risk in exceptionally high tides
Eastriggs: Brownhouses to Dornockbrow	No public access across MOD ordnance depot. Public right of access along shoreline at all times but at high tide no space on beach, although there is ample space to walk on grass above tideline immediately adjacent to the security fence. Alternative suggested by DGC involves diversion along quiet public road and inland farm tracks (proposed core path hence physically viable but sandwiched between noise of railway and busy A75). The only advantage to this diversion is that it takes in facilities in Eastriggs.	MOD previously resisted suggestion of signing or promoting a path along the coastal fenceline on security grounds. Technically the area outwith the wire is still within the designated MOD ordnance site. The depot is no longer used, which may favour agreement to path promotion along south side of boundary fence. MOD is reluctant to consider inland path across depot which might prejudice future sale negotiations, and considers the site still sensitive at present. Promotion of a path along the fenceline would require MOD permission.
<b>Nithsdale</b>		

Ruthwell – Glencaple – Caerlaverock	Long section on public road, albeit very quiet, to avoid coastal marsh.	Length on road could potentially be reduced by development of path from Priests side to Brow Well (map suggests existing track at least part of the way) and new link from Nether Locharwoods to WWT Reserve but latter would require high cost bridge across Lochar Water, with tidal issues, and of little wider public access benefit
Caerlaverock (Castle Corner) to Glencaple	Very limited alternative to B725 which can at times be busy/fast with little opportunity to get off the road	Community council very keen to develop off-road link, and potential wider benefit in doing so to complete off-road access right through from Dumfries to Caerlaverock, but no current plans. Various people suggested fencing off field headlands east of road to create new path but productive farmland so unlikely to be popular with farmers. Potential scope to develop/sign path on drier sections west of road, and a short section through shelterbelt west of Kenneth Bank.
Dumfries to New Abbey (Laghall to Isle steps)	Existing cycle path follows the west bank of the Nith to Laghall, but there is no functional path south beyond this point. DGC suggest linking via Mabie but dangerous section of busy road along A701 between Laghall and Islesteps, and would involve crossing main road east to Kirkconnel Flow.	Ideally coastal path would follow path shown on OS map south from Laghall and then west along north bank of Cargen Pow to Islesteps which is understood to be subject to intermittent flooding. Consultations suggest that burn crossings, flooding and merse restrict scope for development of a new path south from the mouth of the Cargen Pow to Gibbonhill. DGC are committed to developing a safe link between Dumfries and Mabie, probably via the recorded right of way west from Islesteps. There is potential to link on forest tracks directly through from Mabie to New Abbey keeping west of A701, alternatively more coastal route via existing paths/track through Kirkconnel Flow links to promoted coastal path around Airds Point into New Abbey.
New Abbey (Ardwall)	No existing coastal access south	Consultations suggest that in

to Carsethorn	from New Abbey. DGC suggest route follows well established tracks to Ardwall, offering option for the keen to climb Criffel. There is no existing path or off-road link between Ardwall and Carsethorn, walking along A701 is not an option.	theory it is possible to walk (other than at high tide) along the shoreline from North Corbely, but may require diverting back up to the A710 to cross the Drum Burn and Kirkbean Burns. Preferable alternative would be to create a link from Ardwall to the existing path up Kirkbean Glen. Reputedly there was formerly a link (fishing) path between Loch Kindar and Airdrie, and various sections of track are shown on the OS map which offer potential for development, but access is currently restricted by the high march dyke between Airdrie and Criffel House and various other field boundaries.
Caulkerbush to Sandyhills	One of the most significant gaps in the proposed route, and one of the most difficult to resolve. Relatively narrow, busy main road dangerous to walk along. Regular bus service provides link but not within the spirit of long distance walking.	Steep cliffs and narrow strip of land between A710 and sea limit potential path south of road. Consultations and OS map suggest potential for development of off-road track north of road climbing over Millbank and Laggan Hills but latter is currently fenced as deer park and landowner understood to be averse to public access.
<b>Stewartry</b>		
Dalbeattie to Palnackie	Too long a stretch on busy A711, requires development of off-road alternative	Consultations suggest no existing path but may be potential to develop down west side of Urr Water
Almorness House to Orchardton House	Missing link with potential for route development linking existing woodland and farm tracks although DGC argue that this is of minimal public benefit	No existing path but variety of existing tracks, would require negotiation and establishment of some new sections of path, e.g. around Loch Ling
Kirkcudbright ranges	East-west off road path which bisects the range is intermittently closed during live firing (on average once or twice per month), during which time the only viable alternative is either along the dangerous A711, or to follow minor roads via Dundrennan to Kirkcudbright, which although quiet and relatively attractive, involves a very long stretch on tarmac	Live firing times are publicised at least a month in advance through TICs, libraries and other local venues but are subject to change at short notice and are not readily accessible via the internet. MOD are looking into resolving the latter issue. Meanwhile walkers unaware of the restrictions in advance would meet a barrier with explanatory information panel.
Kirkchrist to Back	Busy B727 south from	Existing track is claimed right of

Newton	Kirkcudbright hugs close to the River Dee and is not a viable route for walk promotion. Alternative diversion inland using existing tracks is good contrast with previous section, attractive scenery and should not be too costly.	way, and aspirational core path, not surveyed but should not be out of the question to include or improve as part of the coastal route.
Gatehouse to Creetown	Some sections of very popular and attractive coastal path but frequent obstruction in the form of coastal caravan sites which are very difficult to circumnavigate. Route south of main road would also involve repeat crossings of busy A75. Suggested alternative involves fairly significant inland diversion but good contrast to rest of route and potential wider public benefit.	Old military road is claimed right of way which legally should not be difficult to develop access along, although some physical issues to resolve e.g. cattle ring feeders on track and consequent severe poaching
<b>Wigtownshire</b>		
Wigtown to Crook of Baldoon	No current link between Wigtown and Baldoon, only existing alternative is busy A714, but reconstruction of bridge over River Bladnoch has much wider potential benefits, including link to newly acquired RSPB reserve	Requires bridge replacement (considered easier in line of disused railway than closer to mouth of river) and development of new path across airfield
Balfern to Innerwell	No existing coastal route, shoreline not accessible, only current alternative follows road or climbs fences.	Access officers do not think it would be too difficult to negotiate access around the coast to link existing core paths to north and south
St. Ninian's Cave to Monreith	Walkable along coast but opposition to promotion as path, alternative involves long diversion inland, which provides valuable link (for which there is much local demand) to Whithorn but currently with no option other than public road.	Included in core path plan but withdrawn following objections from landowners about need for fencing to segregate path from cattle grazing and concerns raised by SNH about potential negative effects on vegetation and habitat for breeding choughs. Whithorn is currently totally devoid of any off-road paths accessible directly from the town. Whithorn Trust are very keen to develop off-road paths). Potential route marked on map is entirely aspirational from desk exercise.
Glenluce to Torrs Warren	No existing path or route other than along beach or A75 and B7084. Key missing link.	Good core path down west side of Water of Luce to golf club, open access across beach or around edge of golf course, but currently only way across

		Plitanton Burn is wading at low tide. Alternative would be to develop new path around shoreline south of Whitcrook, and install new bridge across burn linking directly into forest track/core path through Torrs Warren Plantation.
Luce Sands (MOD West Frew)	Public access is prohibited through the MOD range but there is open access along the beach other than when live firing is ongoing	Test and evaluation facility for new weapon systems, used on average once or twice a month.

#### **4.6 Promotion of existing coastal route(s) around Dumfries and Galloway**

Short sections of existing coastal path are already promoted through various publications. Most promote the same routes, or sections of path, albeit under different walk titles.

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Promoted sections of coast path</b>
<b>DGC Walking in and around series – short mainly circular walks, average 1-3 miles</b>	
Stranraer and the North Rhins	Kirkcolm/Wig Bay, short walk around Stranraer to McCulloch's Point, Portpatrick to Killantringan Lighthouse, Dunskey Glen, Water of Luce
South Rhins	Mull of Galloway, East Tarbet to Portankil, Ardwell Bay
The Machars	Wigtown Harbour, Cruggleton Castle and Galloway House Gardens, St. Ninian's Cave, Burrow Head to Port Castle Bay, Stairhaven to the Cock Inn (Auchenmalg)
Newton Stewart and Creetown	Newton Stewart Riverside,
<b>Loch Ryan Coastal Path</b>	
Produced and distributed by Stranraer Rotary Club	Stranraer to Glenapp
<b>Dumfries and Galloway 40 Coast and Country Walks</b>	
Short circular walks, average 1-3 hours, mostly family friendly. A6 guide for sale in TICS and shops	Mull of Galloway Ardwell Bay and Doon Broch Portpatrick coast and glen Wig Bay round Cruggleton castle clifftop walk Isle of Whithorn and Burrow Head Gatehouse-Anworth Gatehouse to Sandgreen Brighthouse Bay circular St. Mary's Isle (Kirkcudbright) Smuggler's coast from Balcary Bay (to Rascarrel) Kippford to Rockcliffe Sandyhills to Rockcliffe Caerlaverock (castle corner to castle)
<b>Walking Dumfries and Galloway (Clan Walk Guides)</b>	
Mainly circular walks of varying length 1-10	Mull of Galloway



miles average	Portpatrick and Dunskey Glen Glenluce, Auchenmalg, Stairhaven Monreith to Kirkmaiden Isle of Whithorn to St. Ninian's Cave Garlieston Bay and Craggleston Castle Wigtown castle and lovers walk Gatehouse of Fleet and Anwoth Rascarrel to Balcary Point Almorness House to White Port Portling to Rockcliffe Caerlaverock Castle and Nature Reserve
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## **5. OPPORTUNITIES AND ISSUES**

### **5.1 Potential tourism, economic, health and wellbeing benefits**

Development of a long distance route along the North Solway offers very significant scope to increase visitor numbers with associated local economic benefits. Although realistically the number of people likely to have time or inclination to walk the whole route in one go is relatively limited, experience elsewhere (including the South-West Coast Path and Fife Coastal Path) clearly demonstrates that creation and designation of a long distance coastal route inspires many people to walk the route in sections over successive years. Experience elsewhere also suggests that signage as part of a long distance route is in itself enough to inspire many people to walk coastal paths they might not otherwise use, to be able to say that they have walked part of the long distance route (who is to know that might only be 2 miles?).

Key promotional opportunities linked to development of a North Solway Coastal Way include:

- long distance coastal route;
- long distance circular route combining coastal route from Annan to Portpatrick, Southern Upland Way to Moffat, and Annandale Way back to Annan;
- shorter (max. 1 day) circular walks based on the long distance coastal route;
- medium distance (2-3 day) circular walks taking in part of the long distance coastal route.

### **5.2 Experience elsewhere – Fife Coastal Path**

A usage and economic impact study for the Fife Coastal Path was completed in 2007, approximately four years after opening of the route. Over the 12 months from July 2006-June 2006, it is estimated that approximately 480,000 – 580,000 visits were made to the path, double the number visiting other key visitor attractions such as Deep Sea World, and eight times more than the number visiting St. Andrews Castle. Numbers using the coastal path are continuing to increase annually.

Annual net expenditure associated with the Fife Coastal Path was estimated at between £24 and £29 million. At the time of survey, the Fife Coastal Path supported 80-90 full-time equivalent jobs. The route is very highly valued by local businesses, with 89% considering it had a very positive effect. The majority do not depend primarily on the coastal path, but it is a very valuable source of extra income and business for them.

52% of users were on a short trip from home, 20% on a day out from home, 26% on holiday. Of those on holiday, 55% were from Scotland, 32% from elsewhere in the UK, and 13% from overseas. Two-thirds of respondents were very likely to visit the route again.

### **5.3 Potential outcomes of route development**

Long term outcomes for coastal path development would include:

- Consolidation and enhancement of the existing path network, including creation of new links.
- Increased opportunities for local residents and visitors to access, enjoy and benefit from coastal paths and routes.
- Increased opportunities for Scottish people to improve their health and wellbeing through physical activity and the restorative qualities of the natural heritage.
- Increased economic benefits for businesses and communities.

#### **5.4 Support for route development**

The vast majority of those consulted in the course of the study are in favour of developing a continuous route along, or close to, the coastline of Dumfries and Galloway. Many were surprised that this was not already in hand or necessarily considered a priority. Most saw it as entirely complementary to other access, tourism and economic development initiatives.

The notable, and only, exception were several of the Dumfries and Galloway Council access officers who maintain that the focus of any further access development and/or promotion should be on independent (i.e. unlinked) circular regional routes including some coastal stretches. The main justification for this argument is belief that shorter routes are likely to be of greater appeal to visitors, and of greater economic benefit, than a continuous long distance coastal route. Other concerns identified by DGC access officers about further long distance route development in Dumfries and Galloway include (not in any particular priority order):

- lack of resources within DGC to address any access other than core paths;
- insufficient resources to maintain existing access, particularly long distance routes such as Southern Upland Way;
- maintenance implications of any additional paths developed or promoted;
- risk of raising user expectations about standards if paths or a route are promoted without sufficient capital investment to establish a common standard;
- perceived lack of demand for long distance routes, not least because of previous experience of under-use of Southern Upland Way;
- focus of limited resources should be on paths for local residents and communities rather than visitors;
- perceived difficulties resolving the missing gaps in terms of coastal access;
- capacity of external initiatives outwith DGC to develop or maintain access to an acceptable standard. DGC's ability and willingness to assume maintenance for any route depends on the quality to which the route has been established initially, the relationship with organisations undertaking the project, and the future cost and liability implications for DGC.

On a more positive note, DGC and SNH are both keen to encourage community involvement and volunteering, and to support symbiotic relationships and closer partnership working. DGC have confirmed that if local organisations, such as Rotary Clubs, community councils or others, are keen to establish a route to an agreed standard and willing to help maintain the route in future, then DGC would be much keener to see how they might offer support and advice. If a long distance coastal path could be established as a recognisable asset, and level of use be clearly demonstrated, then DGC might in future consider inclusion of the route in future core path plan revisions, and taking responsibility for the route. DGC's main concern is long-term continuity and as such they are keen to see a long-term management and maintenance strategy for any future routes which are considered for development.

#### **5.5 Other restrictions on route development**

- Gaps in the proposed route which are not easily resolved, including several sections subject to intermittent closure during MOD operations where the only obvious alternative involves long stretches on road.
- Lack of resources – nationally, regionally and locally.
- Lack of a vision or clear aims and objectives.
- Lack of an effective project champion.
- Lack of political impetus for route development.
- No other initiative(s) or organisation(s) with the remit, motivation or resources to take forward development of a continuous coastal route without further inspiration or support.

## **6. FUNDING OPTIONS**

### **6.1 Coastal Communities Funding**

The Coastal Communities Fund has been set up by the government to support the economic development of coastal communities by promoting sustainable economic growth and jobs so that people are better able to respond to the changing economic needs and opportunities of their area. All projects have to meet the first of four outcomes and at least one of the remaining three:

- (i) Coastal communities are better able to use their assets (physical, natural, social, economic and cultural) to promote sustainable economic growth and jobs.
- (ii) Coastal communities have a greater capacity to create a sustainable economic future and are better equipped to adapt to change.
- (iii) Partnerships are developed to support economic innovation, enterprise and investment either within a community and/or across a number of coastal communities.
- (iv) People have more opportunities for training and skills development, including volunteering.

Proposals must also meet the following criteria:

- (a) Encourage sustainable economic growth.
- (b) Demonstrate that the proposal fits with the broad economic priorities of the local area where possible linking to a wider economic vision which has private sector commitment and support from the community.
- (c) Demonstrate that the proposal unlocks a barrier, addresses a need or opportunity within the area.
- (d) Demonstrate, where appropriate, how they will contribute to green economic growth.
- (e) Provide clear evidence of how they plan to work with other key partners.
- (f) Demonstrate that the project is unlikely to go ahead without Coastal Communities Fund support.

2012 is the first of three annual funding rounds, with £2.05 million to be awarded for projects in Scotland (outwith the Highlands and Islands). Proposals for both capital and revenue projects are invited, with a minimum threshold of £50k. Matched funding is encouraged but not essential. Applications are particularly encouraged from strong cross-sector partnerships working together for the benefit of the community. Priority in Scotland will be given to small and medium sized communities (<60k inhabitants) facing economic challenges, and to projects promoting sustainable economic growth and jobs in tourism, fisheries or aquaculture. The deadline for the first application stage for the 2012 funding round is 27<sup>th</sup> April.

### **6.2 Rural Dumfries and Galloway LEADER funding**

Stranraer Rotary Club have secured LEADER funding for development of their Mull of Galloway Trail, and in the past LEADER might have been an obvious funding source for development of the remainder of the coastal route. However, all funds for the current programme to 2013 have been fully allocated. LEADER are willing to register expressions of interest from potential applicants, in the form of a completed Stage 1 application form, which will be kept on hold in case Scottish Government allocate additional funding, but there is nothing at present to suggest that this is likely to happen. Discussions are ongoing at European level about what form the next programme may take, but no details are yet available and it is likely to be 2014 at the earliest before applications open.

For future reference, LEADER would accept individual applications from different groups for route development, for example local rotary clubs, but all of the applications would need to

be submitted simultaneously and demonstrate co-operation between the various partners. Ideally LEADER would prefer a single unified application with a clear lead partner to fulfil the coordinating role. SUP might in theory fulfil this umbrella role, but would only be considered if clear evidence was provided as to why other organisations were not fulfilling this role themselves. Lack of administrative capacity or unwillingness to take on the burden of administering the grant would not be considered sufficient reason, but LEADER would consider funding the costs of officer time (e.g. a project co-ordinator) appointed by a number of voluntary groups working in partnership.

### **6.3 Scottish Natural Heritage**

SNH locally is keen to support development of a long distance coastal path around Dumfries and Galloway, but is unable to fund any capital work which would qualify for SRDP (see below), and due to SNH's budgetary restraints, is no longer usually in a position to fund other capital access work. SNH would, however, be prepared to consider supporting innovative approaches to coastal path development, for example contributing towards the cost of a project officer who might encourage and assist individual land managers apply for SRDP funding.

### **6.4 Scottish Rural Development Programme**

In theory, funding for improvement of public access on privately owned farmland and woodland is eligible for financial support from the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP). At present there are two possible avenues for funding:

Land Managers Options (LMOs) – the only access related items currently eligible for funding are boardwalks, bridges and culverts, limited to a maximum of £150 per capital item. Installation of access facilities such as kissing gates or self-closing bridlegates would not currently qualify under LMO.

Rural Priorities programme – applications from individual land owners and managers, or from a number of land owners/managers applying jointly, are assessed competitively against agreed priorities.

The deadline for SRDP applications for the 2012 calendar year has now passed. Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspectorate Division (SGRPID) advise that since most of the limited funding has already been allocated, they do not necessarily anticipate another funding application round in 2013. Representations to Scottish Government have been made by the National Access Forum and others to try and positively influence financial support through SRDP, but eligibility criteria for the new successor programme commencing 2014 have yet to be announced. It is anticipated that rules may well change.

### **6.5 Whithorn Trust Landscape Partnership Bid**

Whithorn Trust are currently the lead organisation developing a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Landscape Partnership bid, in partnership with various other organisations. There may be potential to include development of path links or improvement of existing paths as part of the bid, but this will depend in part on the future of Whithorn Trust.

## **7. FINDING A WAY FORWARD**

### **7.1 Agreeing a vision**

Without a clear vision for which formal support can be sought and commitment fostered, on the basis of past experience, development of a long distance path around the North Solway Coast is likely to remain a pipedream rather than ever becoming a reality. DGC's concerns are duly acknowledged, and it is recognised that there are undoubtedly virtues in the development of a series of shorter, circular, regional routes incorporating sections of coastal path. However, these will never provide a real substitute for a continuous coastal path. Suggestion that the missing sections are travelled by bus or car may be pragmatic, but is anathema to long distance walkers, and takes no account of the motivation and satisfaction gained from setting off at the beginning of a route and travelling to the end entirely by people power (i.e. on your own two feet or otherwise). A series of regional routes might be developed from a continuous coastal route, but if given priority could easily distract resources which are already in short supply from the focus of a long distance route, which ultimately is likely to create a far more significant tourist attraction. With all of these points in mind, **it is recommended that the vision to be pursued should be development of a continuous, largely off-road coastal path around Dumfries and Galloway, starting at Gretna and finishing at Cairnryan.**

More specifically, it is proposed that development of a long distance coastal route around Dumfries and Galloway should adopt the following objectives:

- Route alignment should seek to minimise the length on tarmac public road, particularly on busy or main roads. Opportunities for off-road alternatives to be explored wherever possible.
- Overall, the route should seek to provide a variety of scenery and experiences for users, including sites and features of scenic, cultural and heritage interest as well as different topography, gradient and character.
- Capital establishment work including specifications for gates or other access facilities, drainage and surfacing should seek to maximise sustainability and minimise future maintenance requirements.
- Route development and promotion should not detract from or adversely impact upon the wildlife, heritage and scenic interest of the area through which the route passes.
- By definition the route should mainly be designed to follow the coast, although some sections may deviate inland where there is no viable sustainable alternative due to physical obstructions such as steep cliffs, proximity of main road to the shore, or land management issues. It is recognised that such deviations may also have benefits in affording contrasting views and taking in local services, but should adhere to the other key principles.
- Links should be identified to local communities, services and facilities to maximise economic benefits and usability.
- The route should be accessible to as wide a range of users and abilities as possible, recognising that some narrow or steep sections are unlikely to be able to sustainably support use by cyclists or horse-riders.
- Presumption should be on use of the least restrictive option for design of all access facilities, with self-closing gates or where necessary kissing gates in preference to stiles, which do not usually comply with the principles of the Land Reform Act or Disability Discrimination Act, and unnecessarily restrict people of different abilities.
- Minor modification to the alignment of most long distance routes is often inevitable. Identifying and negotiating sections which are less than perfect but where there might be scope for later improvement may be preferable to deciding against route development in pursuit of perfection from the outset.

## **7.2 Route name**

Naming of any route has important consequences in terms of promotion and marketing. Experience with long distance routes around the UK confirms that how readily potential route users (and others) can locate a route geographically, the picture conjured in the mind by the route name and its relationship to other routes all influence potential appeal to the generable public, and level of use. This report adheres to the name in the brief, i.e. the North Solway Coastal Way, but it is suggested that in pursuing route development, an alternative name be adopted for the proposed coastal route on the following grounds:

- Route names which are not easily located geographically are a disadvantage in marketing terms. Even in the UK, many people would struggle to locate the Solway Firth.
- The route extends beyond the North Solway coast, around the Irish Sea coast to Loch Ryan.
- Tourism marketing is trying to establish Dumfries and Galloway as a destination.

Possible alternatives include:

<b>Suggested route name</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Dumfries and Galloway Coastal Way	- Builds on D&G identity and Destination D&G	Many people (even in the UK) do not have a clue where D&G is
South West Scotland Coast Path	- Immediately evident where in the UK the route is. - Includes key word "Scotland" which is useful in attracting foreign visitors. - Potential spin off from internet searches for SW Coast Path in England	The word "path" implies there is an actual path whereas some of the route is likely to be around the shoreline, although this is also true of other coastal paths e.g. Fife.  Risk of confusion with SW Coast Path

## **7.3 Achieving the vision**

Experience elsewhere suggests that successful development of any long distance route depends on an individual or organisation championing and driving forward the idea. Other key stages in achieving the vision will be:

- Identification, survey and negotiation of appropriate option(s) to address the missing gaps, and where possible to reduce the length of route on road.
- Development and erection of effective signage and waymarking for the full length of the route.
- Identification of appropriate locations for information and interpretative provision.
- Website development.
- Promotion and marketing of the route.

## **7.4 Potential partners**

All of the above stages need to be developed and undertaken in partnership with relevant individuals and organisations. Potential partners will include:

Dumfries and Galloway Council  
Destination Dumfries and Galloway  
Solway Firth Partnership  
Scottish Natural Heritage  
Whithorn Trust

### **7.5 Development options**

Taking account of all the information, comments and suggestions gathered during the course of consultations, and research into experience elsewhere, several options present themselves as the most obvious for taking forward proposals for development of a North Solway Coastal Way. The options summarised below are not necessarily mutually exclusive. All are subject to securing necessary funding.

<b><u>Potential development option</u></b>	<b><u>Pros</u></b>	<b><u>Cons</u></b>
1. <b><u>Project officer</u></b> – role(s) might include working with community groups (e.g. Rotary clubs and others) to develop firm proposals for route establishment, deliver necessary training and advice to establish consistent route standards, and/or liaising with land managers and co-ordinating funding applications (including potentially SRDP). negotiating route, managing implementation of necessary improvement work and establishment of website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated time to develop further community involvement and/or implement route.</li> <li>• Scope to reallocate or make use of spare capacity in existing staff time as an alternative to new appointment.</li> <li>• Provides access to requisite skills and professional experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of long-term commitment or facility for route management, promotion and maintenance</li> </ul>
2. <b><u>Ad hoc approach in partnership with local initiatives</u></b> e.g. Whithorn Landscape Partnership, local development initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds on existing local knowledge, expertise and commitment.</li> <li>• Bottom-up approach appeals to funders.</li> <li>• Ties in with work already being done locally.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some sections of coast do not have a readily identifiable local initiative ready and/or willing to become actively involved in coastal path development.</li> <li>• Risk of more piecemeal approach and lack of consistent standards.</li> <li>• Lack of cohesive delivery programme.</li> <li>• Still requires co-ordination.</li> <li>• Questionable longer term commitment to maintenance or promotion.</li> </ul>
3. <b><u>Partnership project with local Rotary Clubs</u></b> throughout Dumfries and Galloway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stranraer, Ayr and more northerly Rotary Clubs provide good role model.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of experience of access, particularly required standards.</li> <li>• Without overarching</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential long-term community commitment sought by DGC.</li> <li>• Access to wide range of expertise.</li> <li>• Good local contacts and business links.</li> <li>• Local knowledge.</li> <li>• Bottom-up community based approach.</li> </ul>	<p>umbrella co-ordination risks piecemeal approach and does not guarantee continuous route.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depends on interest and commitment of at least one figurehead within each club to pick up and run with the idea, and an enthusiastic nucleus of people within each club.</li> </ul>
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DGC have confirmed that they would not be averse to any of the above approaches, including proposal for route development by local voluntary organisations such as Rotary Clubs, provided DGC were consulted from the outset and kept informed. Training regarding access legislation and appropriate standards for route development would be desirable, together with guidance and advice re. appropriate structures for access facilities.

### **7.6 Lead organisation**

Regardless of which delivery mechanism is pursued, a suitable lead organisation is required to initiate, champion and promote route development. DGC have made it clear that their priority must be on implementation of the core path plan, and that they lack the staff or other resources to take forward any additional path development. They are concerned that any organisation which might take a lead in development of a coastal path has the capacity and commitment for longer-term route maintenance, and promotion., ideally with long-term community commitment. None of the community councils or local development initiatives consulted were willing or able to take the lead on coastal route development, nor were local walking and ramblers clubs interested in committing to such a role.

Solway Firth Partnership were suggested by DGC as the most obvious choice of lead partner, but are already over-committed and do not see coastal path or access development as falling within their remit. Solway Firth Partnership in turn confirmed suggestion by many others that Southern Uplands Partnership are the obvious lead organisation to take forward route development, although DGC have expressed concerns about longer-term responsibility for route promotion and maintenance.

### **7.7 Recommended action and next steps**

Taking account of scope for further promotion and consolidation of existing sections of route, key gaps in the proposed route which are potentially resolvable short-term, ongoing core path development, other initiatives such as development of the Mull of Galloway route and funding opportunities, a recommended realistic action plan would be:

- Agree with potential partners vision for development of a continuous South West Scotland coast path.
- SUP consider capacity to act as lead organisation in coastal path development and how to respond to DGC concerns.
- Produce proposals for and submit expression of interest to Coastal Communities Funding for initial project to support dedicated project officer/staff time to work with RSPB, Rotary Clubs, Whithorn Trust, community councils, local development initiatives and other local community groups. The first phase might focus on the section of coast between Kirkcudbright and Glenluce (ideally Torrs Warren or Dunragit, linking directly to the Mull of Galloway route. Funding application would

ideally include a nominal budget for capital work such as installation of necessary gates etc., with costed specifications for major items such as wide-span bridges researched in the first phase for inclusion in a second funding application in 2013, which would also include development of the remainder of the route east from Kirkcudbright.

- Initiate discussion with Rotary Clubs. Approach to other clubs needs to come from an existing club. Tom Stevenson (chair of Stranraer Rotary Club) has already confirmed his willingness to meet with other groups, but has no direct contact or links with those to the east of Stranraer, which are in a different region. Someone (SUP?) needs to initiate the meeting.
- Maintain contact with Whithorn Trust re. potential partnership working and HLF Partnership bid.
- Lobby appropriate DGC officers and members to secure project support.
- Identify and pursue potential champion to help promote the concept of the route.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

Dumfries and Galloway has a spectacularly varied and attractive coastline. To quote from the Solway Coast Heritage Trail leaflet:

“... between the vast tidal flats of the Solway Firth at Annan and the towering sea cliffs of the Rhins....the magnificent coastline is richly endowed with estuaries, rocky headlands, sandy bays, stony beaches, cliffs and caves that will inspire your imagination.”

The very significant wildlife interest of this coastline is recognised in a host of European, national, regional and local designations: two European marine sites, three National Scenic Areas (NSAs) recognised for their outstanding natural beauty; three Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), a Special Protection Area (SPA), 21 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), local and national nature reserves, all designated because of the wealth of wildlife they support, and proposals for a national park and regional park, both of which would encompass part of the coastline. The rich cultural heritage is evidenced by a plethora of archaeological sites, including over 100 scheduled ancient monuments, as well as numerous conservation areas and listed buildings. Yet many people are unaware of the riches which the coast of South-West Scotland has to offer, or the potential to fully appreciate the region by walking along the coast.

Several coastal projects have recently attracted LEADER funding – Making the Most of the Coast and DDG’s revitalisation of the Solway Coast Heritage Trail. Stranraer Rotary Club are busy developing a new path between Stranraer and the Mull of Galloway, and DGC is working hard to implement the draft core path plan, which includes various sections of new path around the Rhins. But despite Scottish Government enthusiasm and support for a continuous coastal path around Scotland, nothing is currently being done to develop a largely off-road coastal path around Dumfries and Galloway.

Consultations and mapping undertaken through this study suggest that over 90% of a potential route already exists and, taking account of work already in hand through various organisations, would require only signage and waymarking to establish a functional coastal path. Approximately 55% of the mapped route is on paths already included within the draft regional core path plan, a further 3.3% is under development as the Mull of Galloway Route, and nearly 6% is on accessible shoreline. In total this equates to roughly two-thirds of existing off-road route. A further 5% of the proposed route follows existing tracks, paths already promoted as LMCs, or paths identified in the core path plan as aspirational core paths along which no significant problems are anticipated in route development. The proportion of the proposed route currently on quiet road, or on short stretches of busier road with a pavement, is under 20%, well within the criteria for Scotland Great Trails. There is scope for further reduction of the proportion of route on road, subject to funding and landowner negotiation. The tourism, economic, health and recreational benefits of linking these existing sections of path together to create a long distance route are potentially great.

At the outset of the study, it was (quite wrongly) assumed – or hoped - by many that “all” that was required to develop a continuous functional coastal route was to agree an appropriate mechanism and secure the necessary funding to carry out capital improvements to bridge any gaps in the existing path network. In reality, the situation is somewhat different. Although no significant problems are anticipated in negotiating promotion of existing tracks and LMCs as part of the coastal path, the outstanding 9.25% of the route where there is currently no alternative to sections of busy main road are less easily resolved and would require detailed survey of potential options, tactful negotiation with landowners, and funding of necessary capital work. Other current restrictions to route development and promotion include:

- lack of political impetus for route development;
- lack of resources or commitment within DGC to take forward route development;
- resistance from some access officers to the concept of a long distance coastal route;
- no other initiative(s) or organisation(s) with the remit, motivation or resources to take forward development of a continuous coastal route without further inspiration or support.

In the current financial climate, coinciding with the expiry of current LEADER and SRDP funding, some would argue there could not be a worse time to try and develop a long distance coastal route. Conversely, in many other ways, development of a South-West Scotland coastal path has never been more pertinent. Over and above the potential economic benefits, the proposed route has potential to do for walking in South-West Scotland what the 7-Stanes project has done to put the region on the map as one of the top UK destinations for mountain biking. Indeed a long distance coastal path is entirely complementary to mountain biking – providing simultaneous opportunities and challenge to satisfy the differing interests of individual family or group members. Coastal access epitomises Dumfries and Galloway’s “naturally inspiring” tagline, and offers potential new products for marketing as part of DDG.

The Coastal Communities Fund offers a unique opportunity to fund route development through a bottom-up community based partnership approach. Stranraer Rotary Club have already confirmed their willingness to meet with other Rotary Clubs in Dumfries and Galloway to discuss potential for parallel projects to their Mull of Galloway route. SUP are ideally placed to provide the necessary facilitation and co-ordination role, and could potentially link coastal path development to the lead role which SUP has taken in relation to development of the proposed Galloway and South Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve by focusing initially on the section of coast between Kirkcudbright and Glenluce, which falls within the proposed transitional zone of the biosphere. Application for project officer funding could provide necessary dedicated time to work with and support local communities, and to provide training and advice in response to DGC’s concerns about consistent standards of route establishment, signage, waymarking and a cohesive approach to route development and promotion.

**APPENDIX A –  
LIST OF ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS CONSULTED DURING THE STUDY**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Contact name/role (at time of consultation)</b>	<b>Tel. No.</b>
Annan Walking Group	Archie Smith	01461 203250
Ayr Rotary Club	Dr. Jimmy Beg – founder of Ayrshire Coastal Path	
Caerlaverock Community Council	Douglas Anderson – Chairman	01387 770111
Colvend Community Council	Stuart King – Chairman (also Chairman of Dumfries and District branch of Ramblers Scotland)	
Cumbria County Council	Guy Timperley – Countryside Access Officer Dave Clare – Access Officer Bob Muscat – Countryside Ranger	01228 673083 0777 3819101
Destination Dumfries and Galloway	Inga McVicar – Project Officer Wilma Findlay – Chair	01557 814040
Dumfries and Galloway Council	Anna Johnson – NSA Officer David Clyne – Nithsdale Access Officer Karen Morley – Wigtownshire Access Officer Jo Mercer – Stewartry Access Officer Richard Masters – Annandale Access Officer Simon Fieldhouse – Team Leader Gilbert Clarke – Access Maintenance	
Fife Coast and Countryside Trust	Amanda MacFarlane – Chief Executive	01592 656080
Gatehouse Development Initiative	David Steel	01557 814226
Kirkbean Community Council	John McMyn – Secretary/Treasurer	01387 880326
Ministry of Defence	Ian Brown – Maintenance (previously NSA Ranger) Dave Crosby - Range Safety and Liaison Officer Scott Ashworth – MOD Access Officer	0141 224 8520
Rural Dumfries and Galloway LEADER Programme	Nicola Hill	
Scottish Natural Heritage	Barry Dunne – Area Officer (Dumfries and Galloway) Ron McCraw – Recreation and Access Manager	01786 450362
Smiths Gore	Tom Florey – Factor Caerlaverock Estate	
Solway Firth Partnership	Pam Taylor Claire MacFarlane	01387 702161
South Ayrshire Council	Neil Feggans	01292 61612
Stranraer Rotary Club	Tom Stevenson, President	01776 707408
Whithorn Trust	Janet Butterworth	019885 00508

































