

# Aird Community Links

## Project report

**By Sandra Hogg, Ged Church and Elizabeth Shiach**

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Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Trust  
Company Limited by Guarantee  
Registered in Scotland No. 199977  
Scottish Charity No. SCO 29389

Registered Office:  
Pilgrim Cottage  
Wardlaw Road  
Kirkhill  
IV5 6NB

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# Aird Community Links

## *Project summary*

### **Introduction**

Aird Community Links is a path network that grew out of the community's desire for safe walking and cycling routes around Kirkhill and Bunchrew on the Beaully Firth, to the west of Inverness.

A path group of Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Trust\* was set up to take forward the community's ideas which have culminated in a new roadside path linking Inchmore and Easter Moniack and a network of signed minor roads and tracks.

### **Benefits**

- A safe route alongside the A862 between Inchmore and Easter Moniack enabling school pupils and others to travel to and from the bus stop at Inchmore, and for primary pupils to travel to Kirkhill Primary School
- A recreational network of paths and minor roads
- Added economic value to the area from recreational opportunities for visitors encouraged to stay longer in the area.

\* Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Trust (KBCT) is a charitable trust formed in September 1999 to carry out and encourage educational, economic, environmental and recreational activities within the area of Bunchrew and Kirkhill. KBCT is a company limited by guarantee and registered as a Scottish Charity.



## **Support**

The project has not been an easy one to achieve and has required an immense amount of work by a small group of volunteers, over three years. The support of a few skilled professional advisors has been invaluable. In particular, we are grateful to The Highland Council Roads and Transport Department, Nicole Wallace of the Partnership for Rural Inverness and Nairn and David Andrews of the Highland Access Project.

The project has also relied on the goodwill of the landowners across whose land the new path passes. We are very grateful for their support and assistance.

## **Challenges**

- Having secured initial funding the price of construction increased as the specification of the path changed.
- New funding had to be found and partners encouraged to increase their commitment.
- Negotiating agreements over the land took longer than anticipated.

## **Outcomes**

Ultimately many people have expressed their delight at seeing such a highly visible and good quality facility appear in their community. There has been considerable use of this link, and the associated routes, since March 2003. From May to December 2003 an average of 59 walkers and 38 cyclists used the new path per week.

## **Future**

The Group believe that this project has laid the foundation in our community for the life style changes aspired to in government policy statements on Health Environment and Transport. It furthermore contributes to the aims of the Highland Area Pilot Community Plan.

The Group hopes that the community can build on this co-operative experience and develop further access links with the communities on the south side of the Beaully Firth.



**Before new path construction**



**After new path construction**



**Path network orientation board**



# ***Detailed project report***

## **Establishing the need**

A community planning exercise in 1998 by Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Council identified path networks as a community need. Subsequent consultations carried out by KBCT identified the need for safe routes along main roads. The road from Inchmore to Easter Moniack was identified as a priority.

## **Feasibility Study**

A feasibility study was carried out with funding from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Inverness and Nairn Enterprise (INE) The report priced the Inchmore/Moniack link at £34,500 and advised that the link be part of a wider, signed and promoted core path network in order to have the best chance of obtaining funds.

## **Costing and specification of new path**

The initial costing from The Highland Council (THC) gave a cost of £114,000, excluding management and supervision costs and land transfer. This was for a 2m wide path.

The subsequent feasibility study priced a 1.2m whindust path at £34,500, including management.

Design modifications suggested by Paths for All Initiative (PFAI )to include a sealed surface gave a re-estimated cost of £48,500.

Further specification changes to include a 50mm bitmac surface to meet THC specifications (required for them to undertake maintenance of path) further increased costs.

The final price agreed with the contractor was £45,524 excluding VAT. Additional costs of £4,850 for tarmac to bring the path up to 2m width were funded by THC TEC Services.

Additional work necessary during construction was met by the Group's contingency element of funding.

## **Construction**

Three companies tendered for the job and the lowest tender was accepted. Construction started in December 2002 and was largely complete by March 2003.

## **Maintenance**

THC agreed initially to maintain the western, roadside, part of the path. Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Council gave a commitment to maintaining the remaining part of the path for ten years.

THC have subsequently indicated a willingness in principle to maintain the whole length of the path. This will only be considered after the contractor's liability for maintenance has elapsed after one year.

Volunteers from the Community carried out verge strimming and tidying work in September 2003. It is expected that this will continue in future years.

## **Funding**

Funding of £30,000 was secured early on from Fresh Futures, a funding stream of the National Lottery New Opportunities Fund. Additional sums of £21,560 were expected from PFAI, SNH, The Highland Council, and the Community Land Unit.

Increased costs due to additional works and specification changes led to a shortfall in funding. SNH and Highland Access Project (HAP) revised their contributions, and the local Councillor contributed discretionary funds. THC TEC Services agreed to fund the monitoring. INE, The Co-operative Society Community Dividend Fund and the Community Land Unit contributed funds. An application to Entrust failed.

The total funding package came to £63,270 with additional in kind contributions of £5000 from THC and £1580 from KBCT.

## **Access Agreements**

It was agreed early, on the basis of advice from HAP and Eddie Garden, who had carried out similar work for the Footpath Trust, to enter into agreements with the landowners rather than go down the route of land purchase. We secured funding from the Community Land Unit to cover a percentage of the legal costs incurred by us and the landowners.

From March 2002 the Group began to formalise the path agreements with the five landowners. Legal agreements were drawn up by our solicitor. Negotiations largely went very well. The landowners were supportive and some bore their own costs. However, finalising the agreements took longer than anticipated and this held up the start of construction.

## **Promotion**

It was decided that wooden fingerposts would be most in keeping with the area. Siting and wording were agreed by the Group. Signs were purchased and erected by HAP.



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A leaflet was drafted with the support of HAP. Photos were taken by a group member. The leaflet was designed by The Highland Council and final wording and layout agreed by the Group. Printing was organised by HAP. Leaflets were distributed by the group to the Community, through the local newsletter, and to local businesses and by HAP through Tourist Information Centres.

## **Monitoring**

Monitoring of the new path was a condition of grant from several funders. A counter that differentiates between walkers and cyclists was designed and installed by Schmidt Electronics. A buried data pod collects the information from three pneumatic strips set into the tarmac which can then be downloaded onto a computer.

Monitoring from the May to December 2003 showed 2,244 walkers and 1467 cyclists used the path. This averages at 59 walkers and 38 cyclists per week. Table 1 (page 19) shows path usage over this period and shows seasonal variation. Peak use is over the summer months with usage reducing over the winter. This is more pronounced for cyclists than walkers. The peak for walkers in September coincides with the Path Network's official opening.

## **Additions to the network**

A perceived weakness in the first phase of the Network had been the lack of promoted off-road links. In 2002 Forest Enterprise obtained funds, through HAP, to redevelop old paths in Reelig Glen which are now restored and part of the Network.

The Group were also contacted by Fountain Forestry, Managers of Newtonhill woods, who wished to carry out a community consultation as part of their application for certification under the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme. After a meeting with the local manager, Mr. Douglas Murray, and about 20 local residents and community representatives, an agreement was reached to improve, sign and create paths in Newtonhill woods. Existing routes have been added to the Network.

## **Linked Projects**

Alongside this network the parallel "Safer Routes To School" initiative progressed by Kirkhill School Safety Team have secured traffic calming in Kirkhill, a shared use route from Kirkhill to Inchmore and a crossing of the A862 at Inchmore linking the Kirkhill road roadside path to the new Inchmore to Easter Moniak link.

## **Draft Access Network Strategy for Aird Community Links**

This was produced to outline the vision, aims and objectives of the network.

- Phase 1 (December 2000 to April 2003) of the project including new path construction from Inchmore to Easter

Moniack, monitoring, signposting and publicity has been completed.

- Phase 2 (October 2002 to 2006) - links within Newtonhill Woods and Reelig Glen completed with additional routes under negotiation.
- Phase 3 (2004 –2010) Development of off road links to wider community and neighbouring communities. Round the Firth cycle Route & Beauly river crossing.



**Construction of the new path**



**With thanks to**

***Path Group Members***

Alice Clifford ( 2001 )

David Shepherd ( 2001)

Ged Church

John Finlay

Sandra Hogg

Ally MacNeill

David Ogden

Elizabeth Shiach

***Total of 690 volunteer hours donated to Project up to 31 June 2003***

***KBCT Woodland Group***

Les Bates

***Landowners***

Dr. J. Davies (Lentran),

Mr. Malcolm Fraser (Reelig Estate)

Mr & Mrs D. Macdonald (Drumchardine)

Mr. A MacKenzie (Tealaggan)

Mr. T.Mackenzie (Drumreach)

Mr. E Clark (Wylie Valley Farms)

## ***Advisers***

Fountain Forestry - Douglas Murray

Fresh Futures - Hannah Dineen, Celean Chapman and Iain Roxburgh

Highland Access Project - David Andrews

Partnership for Rural Inverness and Nairn - Nicole Wallace

Paths for All Initiative - Kenny Steele and Phil Clarke

Scottish Natural Heritage - Steve North and Hugh Brown

The Highland Council - Richard Gerring, Les Houlker, Angus MacInnes, Iain MacLennan, John Taylor and Tony Dyer

## ***Funders***

Community Land Unit

Co-op Community Dividend

Fresh Futures

Highland Access Project

Highland Councillor - Jack Shiels

Inverness & Nairn Enterprise

Partnership for Rural Inverness & Nairn

Paths For All Initiative

Scottish Natural Heritage

The Highland Council TEC Services

The Highland Council Economic Development



## ***Consultants***

Richard Ball (Feasibility study)

Douglas Graham (MacLeod & MacCallum Solicitors) (Access agreements)

## ***Contractors***

The Highland Council (supervision of contract and client to contractor)

Mark Hedderwick (Path contractor)

Torrance Partnership (pre contract planning)

Schmidt Electronics (counter)

## ***Thanks also to***

Kirkhill & Bunchrew Community Trust Board of Directors

Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Council

Kirkhill Safer Routes to School



**Receiving cheque for new signs from Co-op Community Dividend Fund**

## ***Appendices***

### **Project diary**

#### **November 1998**

- Community Plan identified Transport & Access as a key theme for development. Priority within that was for action to create footpath and cycle networks linking settlements.

#### **December 1999**

- Discussions between a path group of KBCT and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Highland Council Ranger Service and Leader II on funding and implementation of footpath network in the Kirkhill and Bunchrew area.

#### **January 2000**

- Funding from Leader II and The Highland Council Ranger Service to produce consultative draft of path networks around Kirkhill and Bunchrew

#### **March 2000**

- Consultative draft of path network produced
- Public meeting to discuss draft network. Consensus of opinion that there was no need for signposted paths but the Group should address issue of access along main roads. Lack of prior consultation with landowners probably resulted in some of the negative views.
- Two written responses highlighted the need for a path from Inchmore to Easter Moniack
- Path group agreed to put this proposed path network on hold.



### **June 2000**

- KBCT organised a meeting with community organisations, representatives and residents to discuss priorities for local paths. A safe walking route from Inchmore to Easter Moniack along the A862 was identified as a priority.
- Formation of a new path sub group

### **August to November 2000**

- Consultation with professional advisors from The Highland Council (THC), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Paths for All Initiative (PFAI), and the Partnership for Rural Inverness and Nairn (PRIN).
- THC produced design specification for a 2m path of 1km length from Inchmore to Easter Moniack. Estimated cost £114,000 excluding management and supervision and land transfer costs.
- Feasibility study funded by SNH and INE commissioned.

### **February 2001**

- Feasibility study completed. Advised reduced specification path to reduce costs and extension of the project to form a local core path network incorporating minor roads and existing used tracks. 1.2 m whindust surface path priced at £34,500 ( including management ).

### **March to April 2001**

- Meeting with THC countryside officer to look at possible routes for the path network.
- Agreed that the first phase should be mainly signposted minor road with the new path enhancing the recreational value of the network

### **June 2001**

- Study presented to community groups.
- Agreement reached to apply for funds for a path network incorporating the new link path under the title 'Aird Community Links'

### **August 2001**

- Application to Fresh Futures for £30,000

### **October 2001**

- Award of £30,000 from Fresh Futures.
- Indications of grants from SNH, PFAI, THC Economic Development, THC TEC Services and the Highland Access Project

### **October 2001 to May 2002**

- Applications for additional funds.
- SNH and HAP revised their contributions. The local Councillor contributed discretionary funds. THC TEC Services agreed to fund the monitoring. INE, The Co-operative Society Community Dividend Fund and the Community Land Unit agreed contributions.
- Application to Entrust unsuccessful.

### **November 2001**

- Design modification of new path advised by PFAI. Re-estimated construction costs to include sealed surface (low maintenance) £48500
- New path construction went to tender
- Advice on path agreements, lease or land transfer was obtained from HAP, the Community Land Unit (Highlands and Islands Enterprise), Eddie Garden (Footpath Trust ) and Kenny Steele ( PFAI ).

### **December 2001**

- THC Roads and Transport agreed to supervise works and accept responsibility for maintaining the western (roadside) half of the path. However, required high specification for path construction including 50mm bitmac surface.
- Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Council gave a commitment to maintaining the remaining part of the path for 10 years.
- Three tenders received.
- Meetings with all the landowners and agreement to the paths construction made.
- Site meeting with THC and potential contractor (lowest tender) identified some additional costs including additional drainage and rockfill.





- THC TEC Services agreed to act as client to the contractor. Therefore VAT no longer payable and £8000 saving to the project.
- Contractor revised price to £45,524 (still lower than other original tenders). Tender accepted.

#### **January 2002**

- Planning application submitted

#### **March 2002**

- Legal agreements drawn up by our solicitor with help from PFAI
- Formalisation of access agreements with the five landowners began

#### **May 2002**

- Final funding agreed

#### **Mid 2002**

- Started work on network promotion. HAP gave valuable assistance.

#### **July 2002**

- Draft Access Network Strategy for Aird Community Links produced

#### **October 2002**

- Access agreements completed

#### **December 2002**

- Construction began. KBCT obtained permission to use 200 tonnes of local waste concrete in place of rockfill – saving £1,500 and avoiding unnecessary landfill.
- New paths in Reelig Glen opened up by Forest Enterprise and HAP to be part of signed network.

#### **Late 2002 – early 2003**

- Siting and wording of signs agreed and contractor appointed
- Leaflet drafted

### **March 2003**

- Increase in tarmac width to 2m to better enable multiuse of the path funded by THC TEC Services
- Construction completed
- Counter installed

### **May 2003**

- Network signs erected

### **July 2003**

- Leaflet printed

### **July 2003**

- First data download from path monitoring device

### **September 2003**

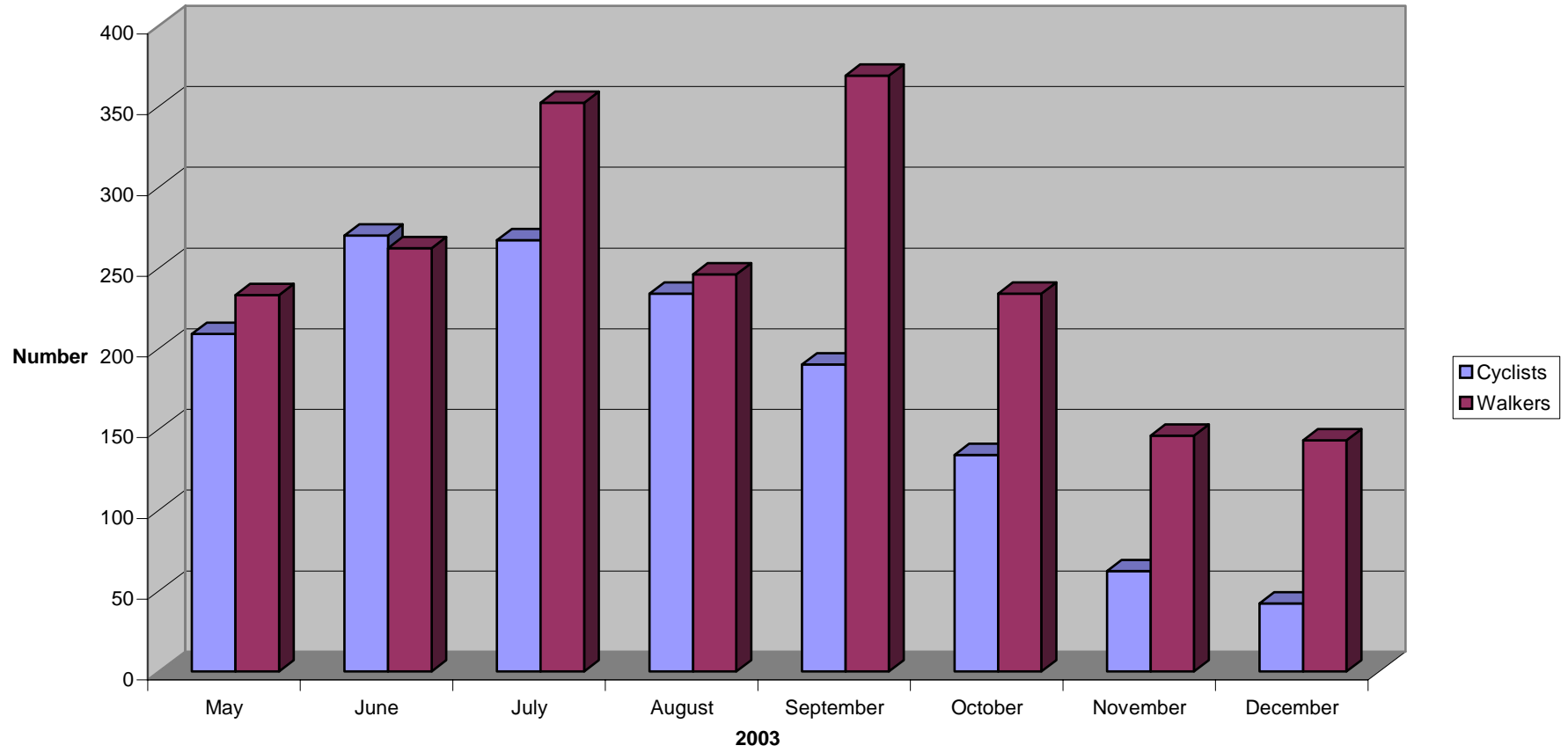
- Official opening of 'Aird Community Links'



**Opening of Aird Community Links**

**Table 1**

**Table 1 - Walkers and Cyclist Use 2003**



## Financial Summary

Breakdown of Capital Costs	Projected Costs	Invoiced Costs to KBCT	Costs paid direct	Outstanding costs	Total costs	Funding Source	Description	Amount Promised	Amount Received
Construction	48851	44365.12				Fresh Futures	Construction	30,000	30,000.00
Construction			5207						
Construction			4758.75						
CDM	830	851.87				KBCT	Insurance	180	203.00
20 sign posts and installation	1400		4093.71			Paths for All	Project costs	3000	3,000.00
Leaflet	1600	1000				SNH	Project costs	5000	5,000.00
Counter	900	970				THC ec dev	Project costs	2500	2,500.00
User Survey	400			400		PRIN	Adrin	270	270.00
Admin	500	448.03		383.79		KBCT	Adrin	80	80.00
Legal Costs	830	528.75				HAP	Signs/leaflets	3000	4,093.71
Insurance	180	203				HAP	Construction	4000	4,758.75
							Monitoring and survey		
Opening		45.5				THC		1300	1,300.00
Maintenance		13.85				INE	Project costs	5000	5,000.00
	<b>55491</b>	48426.12	14059.46	783.79	<b>£ 63,269.37</b>	Jack Shiels	Project costs	500	500.00
						CLU	Legal Costs	830	356.91
						Co-op	Signing	1000	1,000.00
						THC TEC services	Construction		5,207.00
								56,660	<b>63,269.37</b>
<b>In Kind Costs</b>						<b>In Kind Contributions</b>			
Administration and Evaluation	1580				£ 3,750.00	KBCT	Adrin and Evaluation	1580	3,750.00
Construction Management	5000				£ 5,000.00	THC	Construction management	5000	5,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>62071</b>				<b>£ 72,019.37</b>			<b>63,240</b>	<b>72,019.37</b>