



ABERDEENSHIRE

COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS STRATEGY **(LOWLAND AREAS AND ACCESS CLOSE TO SETTLEMENTS)**

Framework Document

2nd Draft February 1998

Draft Consultation Document

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS STRATEGY

(LOWLAND AREAS AND ACCESS CLOSE TO SETTLEMENTS)

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I. INTRODUCTION

More than 23 million walks are taken every year in the countryside by Scottish adults (UK day visits survey 1994). This compares with the aggregate attendance at all Scottish League and League Cup football matches in each of the past five seasons which has averaged just under 4 million. (The Football Trust, Digest of Football Statistics)

A growing demand...

Changes are constantly taking place in Aberdeenshire's countryside. Intensive farming methods and new forest planting alter the landscape whilst new housing and roads make living in and visiting the countryside easier for more people. With more of the population living in or near the countryside and leisure time increasing, there is a growing demand for access to the countryside for quiet informal recreation. Nation-wide surveys indicate that the demand is not currently being met and that up to 60% of people are concerned about where they can go in the countryside. (System 3 Scotland)

Opportunities for access vary...

The history and character of Aberdeenshire means that opportunities for access to the countryside vary across the area. Different mechanisms exist to provide and protect access (Appendix I) but these can only be of real value if they meet an identified demand and the needs of the people who live and work in the countryside. **The key to successful access is achieving consensus between all parties, landowners, users and the community. It is important to acknowledge that many people make their living from the countryside and their concerns about damage and disturbance need to be recognised.**

Providing welcoming and well managed public access in partnership...

The Access Strategy offers a vision of a network of welcoming and well managed public access in the countryside for all sections of the population. It also seeks to promote the contribution which well managed access networks can make to the local economy of Aberdeenshire. The Strategy provides an opportunity to review current arrangements for access throughout Aberdeenshire and to create broad agreement - with everybody who has an interest - on the future development of countryside access. The local authority is in a good position to guide the development of a strategy but can only be truly effective with the help of others. We hope that landowners, communities, managers, interest groups and individuals will recognise the benefits of a co-ordinated strategy and by working together will help to achieve this vision.

A sustainable resource...

Aberdeenshire's environment is one of its most important resources. It contributes to the healthy standard of life enjoyed by local residents and underpins the local economy. Sustaining this resource is an aim which is fundamental to the future development of countryside access as well as providing paths and facilities which are in themselves sustainable.

2. SCOPE OF STRATEGY

First steps...Guiding principles

This document provides the start of a process towards agreeing the way forward for the future provision of access in the Aberdeenshire countryside. It sets out the guiding principles for the provision of countryside access through a series of policies and targets. It also details available resources for the implementation of the Strategy. It does not detail proposals for individual paths. It is proposed that these will be identified at a later stage in the development of the strategy and in consultation with communities, landowners, user groups etc. through the preparation of Area Countryside Access Action Plans (CAAPs) and local access networks.

In this strategy, provision of countryside access means the co-ordination and enabling of access in to the countryside, where appropriate, for the purposes of quiet, informal recreation, and safe passage links, for all types of user groups. **This applies not only to the development of new routes but equally to the improvement and enhancement of existing paths and facilities.**

Sustainability is a key aim of the document and the future provision of countryside access will aim to leave only a positive impact on the environment. Promotion of the access resource will be to a level which the local area can sustain. **All new developments will be in keeping with the local environment and will be sympathetic to the needs of wildlife, community and farming practices of the area.**

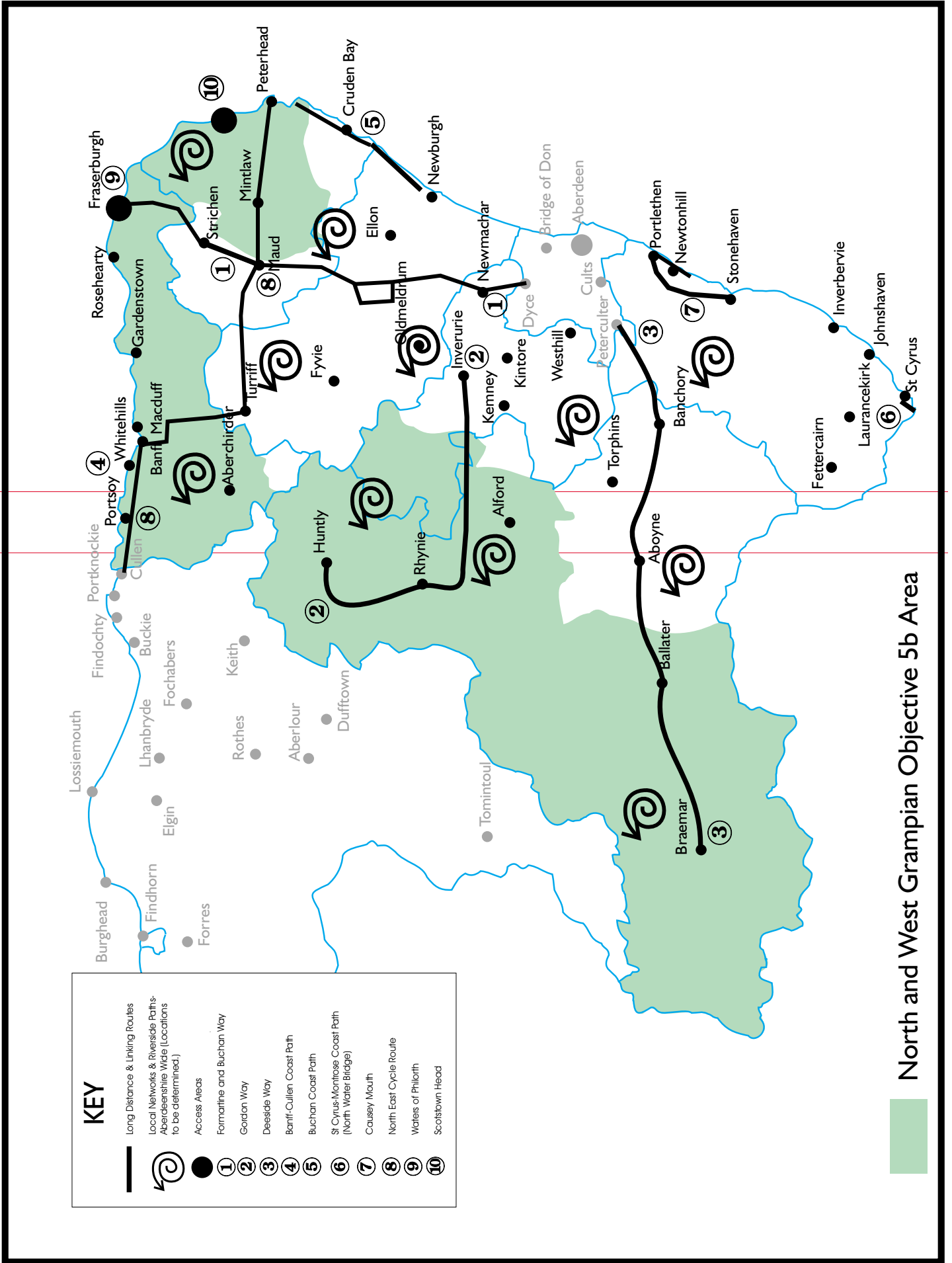
The introductory section noted the discrepancy between opportunities for access in different parts of Aberdeenshire. The highland and lowland divide is very defined in this respect with studies indicating that up to 92% of walks taken by Scottish people are in the lowland areas (System 3 Scotland). **Although in Aberdeenshire this figure may not be wholly appropriate, as many people enjoy casual recreation in the “upland” areas of Deeside and Donside, there is an obvious imbalance in the level of provision between upland and lowland areas and so the emphasis of the first phase of this strategy will be on the lowland areas and areas close to settlements.** This is not to ignore issues surrounding open access to the uplands which will be considered as phase II of the strategy. The work of the National Access Forum in securing the Concordat on Access to the Scottish Hills is acknowledged in this respect **as is the Scottish Landowners Federation document ‘Access without Acrimony’.** **By concentrating on improving access to lower ground the range of access provision can be extended and therefore provide an important tool for managing recreational pressure in more fragile upland habitats.** . Proposals for new countryside access facilities in the upland areas will be taken forward through the area CAAPs in consultation with interested parties.

The strategy is concerned with quiet, informal access to the countryside and it is acknowledged that there are sports associated with the countryside which will not be covered in this report e.g. watersports, four wheel drive, motorcycling. These will require to be addressed through a countryside recreation strategy which will consider organised recreation in the countryside. **There are also a number of activities which are associated with access which require particular attention ie. lowland (cliff) climbing and wild camping which will need addressing in the Area Countryside Access Action Plans.**

3. KEY AIMS

- To provide and manage welcoming access to the countryside in a co-ordinated manner giving consideration to public demand and the needs of all groups with an interest in the countryside.
- **To acknowledge the concerns of landowners and managers in the development of improvement of access and ensure that, as far as possible, all developments achieve consensus of the landowners, community and users.**
- To enable and encourage more people to use and enjoy the countryside through improved arrangements for countryside access **near to settlements in lowland areas**, for the purposes of sustaining the environment, contributing to the rural economy and benefiting the health and well-being of the population.
- To facilitate and encourage proper provision of support visitor and tourism facilities related to countryside access.
- To promote better understanding of countryside access issues by creating opportunities for education in the countryside, **and increasing the awareness and knowledge of the country code.**
- **To take proper account of wildlife habitats when planning countryside access.**

ABERDEENSHIRE ACCESS STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION



4. POLICY BACKGROUND

What has gone before?

Scotland has a long and sensible tradition of mutual tolerance between landowners and the public where access to the open countryside is concerned. The Scottish Landowners Federation in their Access without Acrimony document (1993) believe that the integration of access with other land uses must be achieved by consensus and education rather than resort to the law.

The Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 provides a foundation for access to the countryside. The Act gives powers and places duties on Local Authorities in respect of countryside access for example in securing footpath creation agreements or protecting Rights of Way. The 1994 Scottish Natural Heritage document 'Enjoying the Outdoors' reviewed the position on access to the countryside and identified a role for a proactive partnership approach to the provision and management of countryside access. The Paths For All initiative was subsequently established in 1996 to progress the partnership approach at a local level and provide local access to the countryside for users through the creation of local paths networks around settlements.

Policies contained in Aberdeenshire's Development Plans and publications such as Aberdeenshire Council's Cycling Strategy and Tourism Strategy set a local policy background to the Access Strategy. The Local Agenda 21 process adds another dimension to this by requiring the Local Authority to work towards the development and implementation of policies for sustainable development at a local level. The Access Strategy links into this process by involving local communities in the development of access to the countryside.

Scottish Natural Heritage have recently published a booklet "Countryside Recreation and Access Strategies: Guidance for Local Authorities, 1997". This sets out the process for developing an access strategy. Aberdeenshire is already ahead in developing it's strategy.

As the Countryside Access Strategy develops, the agreed policies will be integrated into the Local and Structure plans of Aberdeenshire Council to ensure protection and integration of access into the future.

5. TOPICS

A) METHODS OF SECURING ACCESS

Developing the web...

Our vision is a web of sustainable access routes and areas throughout Aberdeenshire which will be created by building on the basic network in place at the moment. The plan overleaf shows this in outline. Partnership between local communities, **voluntary bodies**, landowners, agencies and the local authority will be fundamental in ensuring welcoming access to the countryside and a structure for encouraging involvement by all parties is proposed under 'Implementation'.

Countryside Access will be developed through a network consisting of:

- Local Networks of routes and area access which are easily accessible **for walkers cyclists and horseriders** from local communities without the use of a vehicle.
- Linking Routes which will provide a connection between strategic and local networks.
- Strategic Routes and Area Access consisting of long and middle distance routes such as the Formartine and Buchan Way, Coastal Footpaths, the Deeside Way and the Gordon Way and access areas such as Forests and Country Parks.

Seeking access through agreement...

There are many ways through which access to the countryside can be provided and the aim of the Access Strategy will be to identify the most appropriate method for each individual route. Methods which have most commonly been used are access agreements entered into under the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967, permissive paths and footpath creation agreements. Appendix I provides a brief summary of these and other options available to secure and manage public access.

Scottish Natural Heritage, through The Paths For All initiative, stresses the need for **consensus** on the development of local network through local partnerships and the Council is keen to develop this approach. By reaching **consensus** with landowners and local residents on key network routes resources can be targeted more effectively. In **many** cases the Council will seek a formal written agreement with the landowner in order to protect the interests of the public and landowner and will meet a landowner's reasonable legal fees incurred in drawing up agreements for countryside access. Through a formal agreement the Council is able to reduce public liability implications for landowners, **and build in where necessary the need to consider temporary closures of access for safety reasons ie forestry operations, deer stalking or path maintenance**. Costs for improvements to paths etc. will be funded through the Countryside Access Strategy budget.

Local authorities through the statutory planning system also have a duty to secure and protect access through planning conditions and section 50's.

Initiatives such as the Forestry Authority's Community Woodland and Walkers Welcome schemes, **Countryside Premium Scheme** and access to Non Government Organisation (NGO) reserves e.g. Scottish Wildlife Trust, Forest Enterprise Woodlands, **National Trust Properties, RSPB and** Scottish Natural Heritage reserves as well as Council owned land add a further dimension to the overall picture.

POLICY 1 - ACCESS AGREEMENTS

Priority will be given to developing appropriate agreements with landowners over routes which will benefit the development of local network/middle distance and strategic routes identified in the CAAPs.

POLICY 2 - ACCESS TO COUNCIL OWNED LAND

Wherever possible and appropriate, improved access arrangements to Council owned land will be sought during the development and implementation of the Access Strategy.

TARGETS

- Consultation with local community councils/walking/**cycling**/riding groups, major landowners etc. in the first six network areas by the end of January 1998.
- Preparation of a standard access agreement form and guidance note for landowners by the end of **March 1999**.
- Review of Council owned land for inclusion of improved access in CAAPs by end of August **1998**.

Rights of Way...Important Historic Routes

In providing for future countryside access, Rights of Way will form an important element of the network, but not all access will be able to be secured in this way. The Council has a duty to 'assert, protect and keep open and free from obstruction or encroachment any right of way within its area'. However, for landowners and the Council, investigations into Rights of Way can be time consuming and costly. The lack of comprehensive records on Rights of Way in Aberdeenshire is a severe constraint and current legislation for asserting and recording routes is also slow and laborious.

In future, resources will be targeted more effectively by concentrating on: 1) key routes on which local networks can be built, and 2) those routes which are at risk

and where good evidence is provided on the status of the route. More emphasis will be placed on providing better information to reduce landowner and public uncertainty over the status of routes and on involving local volunteers in investigating routes.

POLICY 3 - RIGHTS OF WAY INVESTIGATIONS

The Council will undertake investigations into claimed Rights of Way within its area and as appropriate will seek to assert and protect Rights of Way in accordance with the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 (as amended). Priority will be given to investigating the following routes:

- 1) routes which will be of benefit to the development of local network/middle distance and strategic routes identified in the CAAPs;
- 2) claimed routes, at risk from obstruction, where substantial evidence is provided to the Council which proves to the satisfaction of the Council that a Right of Way has been established, and
- 3) asserted and legally established routes which are at risk from obstruction.

Where routes are not considered a priority, alternative means of investigation will be sought with particular emphasis being placed on community group involvement.

POLICY 4 - ROUTE INFORMATION RECORDING

The Council (in association with the Scottish Rights of Way Society and Scottish Natural Heritage) will improve recording of and access to information on all access routes through the development of the CROW (Catalogue of Rights of Way) database system.

POLICY 5 - RIGHTS OF WAY INFORMATION PACK

A Rights of Way Information pack will be developed **with assistance of the Scottish Rights of Way Society** to help progress route investigation at a local level.

TARGETS

- Preparation of a Right of Way Information pack - end of June 1998
- Develop CROW -begin recording all information on routes across Aberdeenshire by end of **March 1999**- link to a working scale map

B) ACCESS FOR ALL

Equal access for all...

There are over 6 million adults in Great Britain with a disability (Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys 1988) and this figure does not include people who find access difficult, for example because they have small children in pushchairs or because they are elderly. Informal access to the countryside is as important for people with disabilities, elderly people etc. as it is for able bodied people. **The Disability Act states that all provision must take into account disabled use where practical.** Current countryside access opportunities are minimal for these people and whilst not all routes can be designed to wheelchair user standard, the strategy will aim towards equality for the whole population as far as possible. The provision of wide parking bays, toilet facilities, good clear signage, shorter, safe routes with good surfacing and seating areas/shelters are examples of simple improvements which can make all the difference to people who, for example, have difficulty walking or are visually impaired.

POLICY 6 - PROVISION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Provision for informal access to the countryside for people with disabilities will be included within each Area Countryside Access Action Plan (CAAP).

POLICY 7 - CONSULTATION WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Local disability groups and other interested parties will be consulted on the development of the Area CAAPs and specific improvements to countryside access.

TARGETS

- Consultation with local disability groups on CAAPs by **December 1998**.
- Provision for at least two new informal recreation facilities accessible to a wheelchair standard per area in CAAPs.
- Evidence of consideration of needs of people with disabilities in all CAAPs.

C) PROMOTION

Getting the message across...

There is currently a diverse range of signage, interpretative and leaflet information in Aberdeenshire. For users to feel comfortable to use routes in the countryside, there needs to be co-ordination between leaflets and signposting on the ground. This does not need to be obtrusive but must ensure that the user is not only clear where paths start and finish, but also is certain where the route goes. Appropriate information is not only important for the user but also for the landowner. Well marked routes ensure that users keep to the allocated paths and do not stray onto valuable crops or disturb livestock.

Awareness about the benefits of regular exercise will also aid the health of the local population. Information on the location of local **paths** will make it easier for people to use the resource and special initiatives can promote the health aspect of countryside access.

The aim of the Access Strategy is to ensure all future promotion of countryside access is co-ordinated. An interpretative style will need to be developed which relates to all forms of information including signposting and waymarking, interpretative boards, leaflets and other publicity materials. It also needs to consider different needs for signage and information in the upland areas and lowland areas. Through consultation, the Access Strategy will identify needs and form a guide for future production of interpretative material . It will be important that there is co-ordination between all Services and outside bodies involved in the provision of countryside access.

Proper marketing of routes will be important in ensuring that as many people as possible make use of the paths and access areas in the countryside. Close links with bodies such as the Tourist Board and Grampian Enterprise will be sought to develop an appropriate marketing strategy for countryside access in Aberdeenshire.

POLICY 8 - INTERPRETATIVE GUIDE

The Council will, in consultation with interested bodies, develop an interpretative and signage guide to be used at countryside access site. This will guide the co-ordination of interpretative material and give a range of styles suitable for such sites. In the future this will be incorporated into the Council's proposed Interpretative Strategy.

POLICY 9 - MARKETING

The Council will, in association with interested bodies, develop an appropriate marketing strategy to encourage the use of the enhanced countryside network by local people and tourists.

TARGETS

- Development of an interpretative guide by the end of **September 1998**.
- Development of a marketing strategy by the end of December 1998.
- Production of one promotional leaflet per area by **March 1999**.

D) AWARENESS

Sustaining the countryside for future generations...

Awareness of issues affecting the countryside is the key to the long term proper and sustainable use of the countryside by all users. As more people visit the countryside the need for awareness and learning becomes greater. Making countryside users more aware of the pressures on the countryside, where they can go, what they can do when they get there and how to behave, is an important element of the Access Strategy. By ensuring that people are made aware of the issues today, we will be sustaining the countryside for tomorrow. Landowners can contribute by providing information for example, on estate operations or management works. **Support for landowners and managers is essential for the aims of the Access Strategy to be achieved.**

Improving awareness can be approached in a variety of ways, either directly through information on site or indirectly through talks, school projects, the media etc. Aberdeenshire Council is in a good position to positively influence education about countryside access throughout the area through its' schools, community education and ranger service and in house staff training. The unique role of the ranger service means that they will play a very important role in preparing and implementing a countryside access awareness programme. **The key aim of the awareness programme will be to ensure all users know and understand the country code.**

POLICY 10 - COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS AWARENESS PROGRAMME

The Council will, in association with other interested bodies, develop a countryside access education programme which will be implemented across Aberdeenshire to increase the knowledge of all users on issues surrounding countryside access.

TARGETS

- Development of a countryside access awareness programme by the end of December 1998.

E) MAINTENANCE

Maintaining for the future...

Proper and appropriate maintenance of routes and sites is essential, not only for users to enjoy visiting the countryside and to convey the right message of caring for the countryside, but also to meet basic safety requirements.

Maintenance of access sites **can be** expensive and requires a long term commitment, **however path maintenance costs are low when compared with maintenance other leisure facilities.** The Council cannot afford to continue accepting full responsibility for the ongoing maintenance of all new routes. New ways need to be found to maintain paths and there is a potential role to be played by community groups and volunteers.

On all new routes and access areas secured by agreement, maintenance will be considered from the early planning stages. The level of maintenance will be determined by the expected use of the site. Appropriate arrangements will be put in place for funding and implementation of maintenance. Arrangements will also be sought with local groups for identifying maintenance needs and undertaking repairs etc. Adequate training and support e.g. supplying equipment for community groups will need to be built into project costs in order for this to succeed.

POLICY 11 - MAINTENANCE POLICY

A maintenance policy will be prepared for implementation in connection with the development of all new countryside access sites **and maintenance for existing routes reviewed and improved. No new sites or routes will be implemented without appropriate maintenance arrangements in place.**

POLICY 12 - MAINTENANCE OF RIGHTS OF WAY

Priority will be given to the maintenance of asserted and legally established Rights of Way including those routes which form part of the access network developed through the access strategy.

POLICY 13 - COMMUNITY MAINTENANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Council will seek local arrangements for the identification of maintenance requirements and for undertaking routine maintenance on local networks.

TARGETS

- Development of a maintenance policy for use on countryside sites by the end of August 1998.
- Agreements for maintenance in place for all new sites before implementation - ongoing.

F) TOURISM AND RELATED FACILITIES

Aberdeenshire's countryside is one of its best tourism assets. From the Cairngorm Mountains through the Deeside forests, rolling farmland, hills and valleys, to the lowland peatbogs and miles of unspoilt coastline, Aberdeenshire has a rich and diverse natural environment. Past human interaction with the landscape has also left behind an abundant architectural and archaeological heritage. It's history is bound up in fine stone circles, castles, mansions and landscaped gardens and the small towns and villages scattered throughout the area.

In seeking to attract tourists to these areas consideration must be given to the facilities associated with countryside access which will help manage visitors to the countryside and support the tourist industry. These should be sustainable developments which are appropriate to their surroundings and in this respect it will be particularly important to explore possible links between local communities and existing and new facilities. Emphasis will be placed on providing access to existing points of interest.

Facilities may be for the comfort of visitors and people who live and work in the countryside and will include parking and picnic facilities and toilets. Linking public transport to the access network will also be important to make paths accessible to those without cars and to reduce the impact of the private car. Alternatively they may include support facilities which will enhance the public's visit to the countryside. Such facilities may include accommodation, refreshments, craft/visitor centres, guided walks etc. By encouraging more people to visit the countryside, local businesses can benefit from increased tourism in the area.

Through the area CAAPs the countryside access strategy will identify and prioritise those basic facilities which are considered necessary on countryside access sites. It will also encourage, in appropriate locations, the development of further support services where they are lacking or inadequate. At all times emphasis will be placed on sustaining the network and the environment.

POLICIES

POLICY 14 - PROVISION OF VISITOR FACILITIES

Area Countryside Access Action Plans will identify and prioritise the provision of visitor facilities appropriate to each area as part of the development of the local networks.

TARGETS

- Identification and prioritisation of provision of visitor facilities within CAAPs by the end of **March 1999**.
- Development of an annual Ranger led programme of countryside access events by the end of **March 1999**.

G) HEALTH, SAFETY AND LIABILITY

In the development of the Access Strategy, the Council and its partners need to be aware of the health, safety and liability implications that may arise.

Liability circumstances are more limited than people think. SNH recently commissioned a study on liability and the key findings were while there is evidence of anxiety about liability, there are few examples of claims or claiming situations arising.

It is also important that the user of the route is expected to take reasonable care **and the SNH study indicates that there is a strong ethic of voluntary assumption by many people who access the countryside.**

A Local Authority or landowner can only be held liable if it can be shown that they were negligent.

Where the community are involved in the maintenance of networks or link routes there may be a need to ensure that they have the appropriate public liability insurance in place. This could be an extension of the Council Liability Insurance at relatively small cost to the local Community Council or Community Group.

POLICY 15 - HEALTH AND SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES

A Health and Safety statement will be prepared identifying the responsibilities of the Council and associated partners as well as the users of the access developments.

POLICY 16 - PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE

Local Community Councils / Community Groups will be encouraged to consider taking out or extending their Public Liability Insurance where they are heavily involved in access development.

Targets

- Development of a Health and Safety statement by the end of **June 1998.**

6. IMPLEMENTATION AND RESOURCES

The action to be taken...

This framework document marks the beginning of a process to provide co-ordinated and well managed countryside access in Aberdeenshire. Whilst the Council is in a good position to lead the development of the Strategy it is very much dependent on other bodies to make the process worthwhile. Partnership with landowners, communities, users and agencies is a basic building block of the Access Strategy.

The framework document has gone through a period of public consultation and it has been open to review and comment by interested parties. In conjunction with this the next step is the creation of six Area Countryside Access Action Plans (CAAPs) which will provide a local context to the strategy. The decentralised Area Committee structure established by the Council provides the opportunity to develop local priorities for access in close consultation with local communities. Each Area will produce its own Area Countryside Access Action Plan to set out its programme for the next five years. Development of Area CAAPs will be progressed through Access Working Group consisting of landowner and user representatives, local member representation, council officers and agency representatives, and led by a key officer. The implementation process and linkages between the various groups and the process are illustrated in an indicative form in diagrams 1 and 2. A framework for the development of area CAAPs is contained in Appendix 2.

The development of Access Forums in each Area will encourage the exchange of information and discussion of access issues across Aberdeenshire as well as providing a contact point for interested individuals on the development of the Access Strategy. It is strongly hoped that the Aberdeenshire Environmental Forum will play a role in developing these groups. **It is anticipated that the Forums will meet twice a year in a workshop format.**

The Council has a wide range of staff resources available to enable the implementation of the Strategy. Involvement will extend across the Services including:

Planning and Economic Development

Leisure and Recreation

Transportation and Roads

Law and Administration

Education

Information Technology

Where the Council takes the lead in providing new countryside access facilities on the ground, the Planning and Economic Development (Environment and Projects Sections) and Leisure and Recreation Services will, in most cases, take the lead. Expected involvement in each of the targets by Council Services is detailed below (see Programme and Funding). In addition the Council will draw on the expertise of partnership agencies such as Grampian Enterprise Ltd., Scottish Natural Heritage and the Tourist Board etc. wherever appropriate.

The creation of a dedicated Countryside Access Officer post is considered essential to the effective implementation of the Strategy and will continue to be pursued with partnership bodies as appropriate.

POLICY 17 - AREA COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS ACTION PLANS

Area Countryside Access Action Plans will be developed in each of the six administrative areas and will set the local priorities for access development and management.

POLICY 18 - AREA ACCESS WORKING GROUPS

The production of the Area Countryside Access Action Plans will be progressed through Area Access Working Groups which will be established in each area consisting of representation from key interested bodies. **These groups will also be responsible for monitoring the implementation and maintenance of access developments in the area.**

POLICY 19 - AREA ACCESS FORUMS

Area Access Forums will be established (in association with the Environmental Forum) to enable communication, co-ordination and action with outside interests on all aspects of countryside access **with workshops once/twice per year.**

POLICY 20 - ACCESS OFFICER

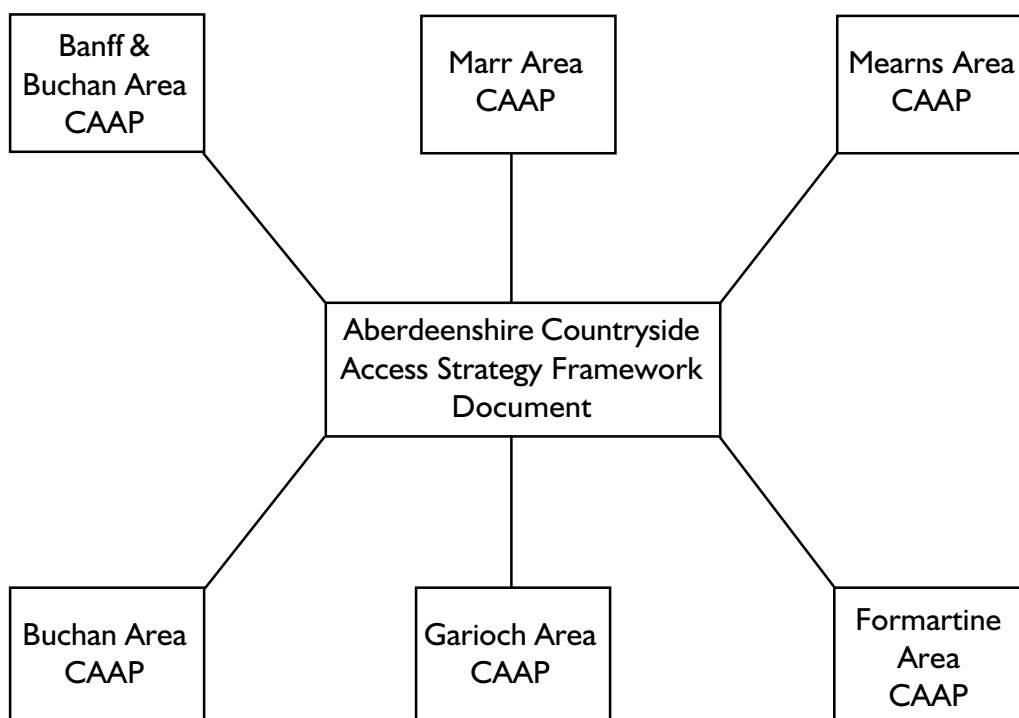
The Council, in association with funding partners have appointed a dedicated Access Officers to further the aims and implementation of the Access Strategy. **The Access Officer(s) key areas of responsibility are the development of path networks for walkers, cyclists and riders around the settlements of Aberdeenshire. The aim being to develop 6 settlement networks every 2-3 years. For** this post to be effective, funding for a further 2-3 years will need to be secured.

TARGETS

- Preparation of six Area Countryside Action Plans by the end of March 1999.
- Set up Area Access Working Groups by the end of May 1998.
- Set up Area Access Forums by the end of September 1998.
- The implementation of six local networks every 2-3 years (one per area)
- start 1998/9.
- Extend the Countryside Access Officer post for a further 2-3 years by the end of March 1998.

DIAGRAM I

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS STRATEGY - Links between Framework Document and Area Countryside Access Action Plans (CAAPs)



Framework Document

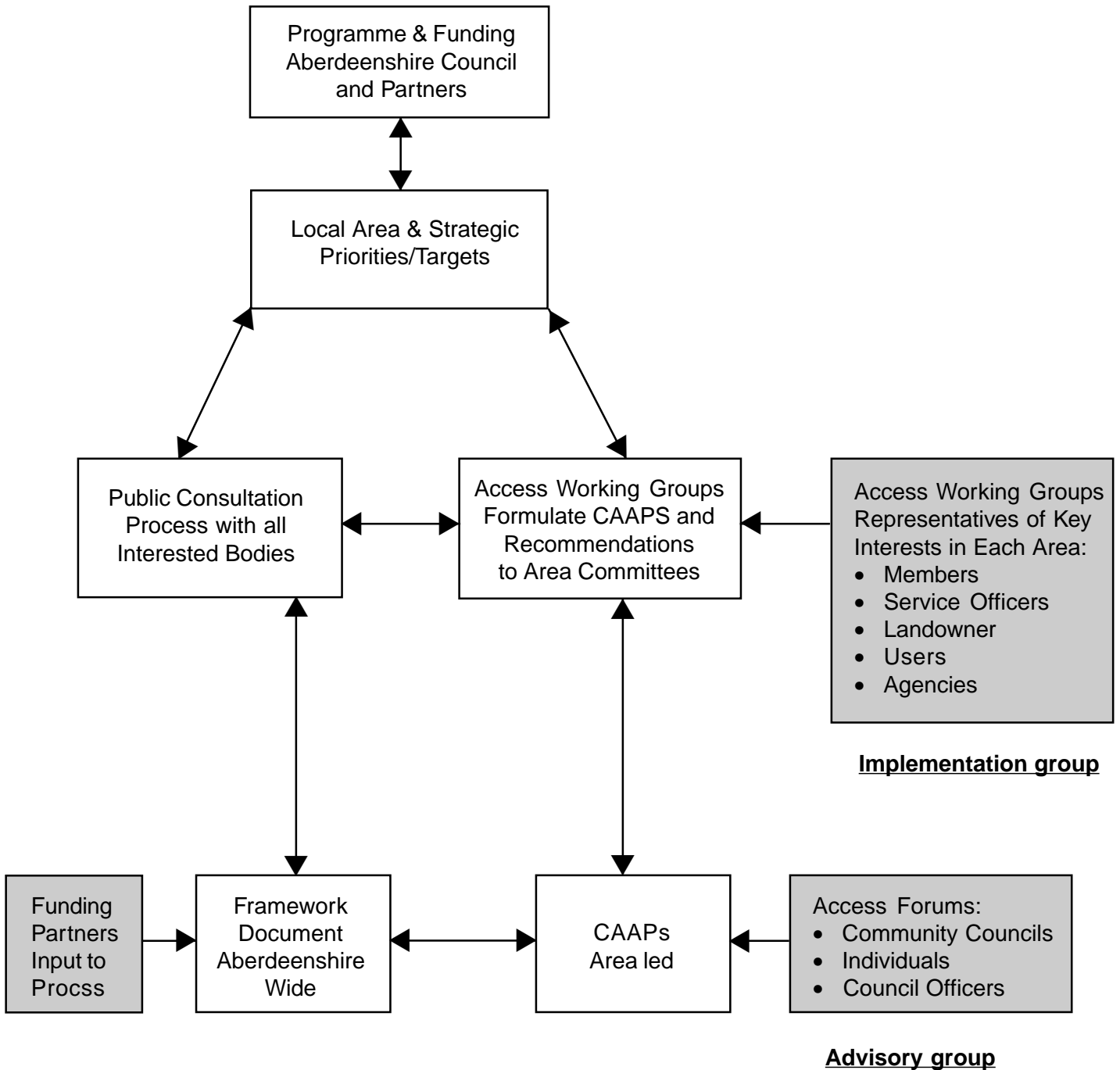
- 1 Aberdeenshire Wide Framework
- 2 Sets Guidelines for CAAPs
- 3 Strategic Policies and Targets
- 4 Strategic Consultations

Area Countryside Access Action Plans

- 1 Local Framework
- 2 Reviews Current Access Provision
- 3 Defines Local Priorities and Targets
- 4 Local Public Consultation

DIAGRAM 2

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS STRATEGY
Implementation Process and Linkage between Groups



7. MONITORING AND REVIEW

An Access Strategy is never “finished” but must evolve to reflect changing circumstances. Monitoring will not be a task in its own right but something which is built into everyday implementation of the strategy.

Monitoring the use and condition of paths and related facilities such as gates, stiles, toilets and car parks are a long term commitment. The Council can not afford to continue accepting the responsibility for the monitoring of all existing routes. New mechanisms need to be found to monitor routes’ associated facilities and there is a potential role to be played by the local Community Groups and Volunteers. In some areas however a more structured approach involving regular formal inspections will be required for structures with safety implications like bridges etc. In either case, it would be the intention to supplement the everyday monitoring by other techniques of gathering relevant information such as counting visitor numbers or undertaking formal surveys. The more that the needs, expectations and attitudes of countryside visitors can be identified and understood, the better we will be able to plan for the future.

It is unrealistic to believe that increased access to the countryside will not change it in any way. However, those visiting the countryside have every bit as much interest as those who live and work on the land in ensuring that the countryside resource is not damaged beyond acceptable and sustainable limits.

POLICY 21 - VOLUNTARY MONITORING ADVISORY SCHEME

The Council will introduce a Voluntary Monitoring Advisory Scheme to manage local arrangements for monitoring the use and condition of paths and related facilities.

POLICY 22 - MONITORING CHANGING OPPORTUNITIES

Access Working Groups with the support from the Area Access Forums will monitor the changing pattern of land use and priorities in the countryside, identify new opportunities for countryside recreation and monitor the extent of the impacts on land management interests.

POLICY 23 - VISITOR MONITORING SYSTEM

A Visitor Monitoring System will be developed to gather important information regarding the use and condition of paths and related facilities.

POLICY 24 - STRATEGY REVIEW

The Council will undertake a major review of the Access Strategy approximately every five years.

Targets

- Development of a Visitor Monitoring System and Advisory Scheme by June 1998.
- Strategy Review - Ongoing.

8. PROGRAMME AND FUNDING

Programme - Below is an example of the programme of targets that need to be achieved over the next 18 months.

	Target	Date	Key Input From
1	Set up area Access Working Groups	May 98	Services, Members, Agencies, Landowners
2	Review of Council owned land for inclusion of improved access in CAAPs	Aug 98	Services
3	Development of maintenance policy for use on countryside sites	Aug 98	PED, L&R
4	Development of a Financial System	Aug 97	PED, Finance, L&R
5	Extend Countryside Access Officer post	March 98	PED, SNH
6	Set up Area Access Forum	Sept 98	Environmental Forum
7	Consultation with local disability groups on CAAPs	Dec 98	Access Officers/Services
8	Approval of 6 area Countryside Access Action Plans	March 99	Services, Access Liaison Groups
9	Identification and prioritisation of visitor/tourist facilities within CAAPs	March 99	as above
10	Provision for at least 2 new informal recreation facilities accessible to wheelchair standard per area in CAAPs	March 99	Access Liaison Groups, Local Disability Groups
11	Develop CROW - begin recording all information on routes across Aberdeenshire	March 99	IT, PED
12	Preparation of a standard access agreement form and guidance note for landowners	March 99	L&A, PED, PFA & SNH
13	Production of 1. no promotional leaflet/area	March 99	Services, TB, GEL, SNH
14	Development of an annual Ranger led programme of countryside access events	March 99	Rangers
15	Development of a marketing strategy	Dec 98	Services, TB, GEL, PFA
16	Consultation with local community councils/user groups/landowners in first 6 network areas	Jan 98	Access Officer
17	The implementation of local networks (1 per area annually)	start 98/99	Access Officer
18	Development of an interpretative guide	Sept 98	Services, PFA, SNH, TB
19	Development of a Health and Safety Statement	June 1998	
20	Development of a Visitor Monitoring System & Advisory Scheme	June 1998	Services/Access Liaison Groups
21	Preparation of a Rights of Way Information pack	June 98	Services, PFA, SNH
22	Link CROW to a working scale base map	Dec 98	IT, PED
23	Development of a countryside access awareness programme	Dec 98	Rangers, Education,
24	Evidence of consideration of needs of people with disabilities in all CAAPs	ongoing	Access Liaison Groups, Disability Groups
25	Agreements for maintenance in place for all new sites before implementation	ongoing	L&R, PED
26	Strategy Review	ongoing	PED, L&R
27	Secure funding to continue Access Strategy Implementation Programme past December 1999	July 99	PED, GEL, SNH

Key

PED	Planning and Economic Development	IT	Information Technology
L&R	Leisure and Recreation	TB	Tourist Board
Services	Cross Council Service Groups	PFA	Paths for All
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage		

Funding - Funding has been secured for year one of the Access Programme (1997/8) and the partners, Scottish Natural Heritage, Grampian Enterprise, Europe and Sustrans have all agreed in principle to further funding over the next 3-5 years. See table below.

	1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000
Aberdeenshire	60,650.0	81,475.0	69,975.0
SNH	53,325.0	68,237.5	54,237.5
GEL	35,825.0	46,237.5	37,237.5
ERDF	92,750.0	106,000.0	66,250.0
Sustrans	20,000.0	20,000.0	5,000.0
Private	20,000.0		
Totals	282,550.0	321,950.0	232,700.0

As funding is essential for the implementation of the Access Strategy, officers will continue to source and secure funding for future years. As many of the partners require claims to be made to access their funding contribution, it is important to establish a financial system whereby all the Council's Services can co-ordinate expenditure in relation to specific project implementation and that this can be accessed in a simple and effective way when grant claims are being produced.

A well devised financial system will also assist in the monitoring of the Access Strategy and ensure that expenditure is evenly or appropriately spent over the Council Areas and in accordance with the appropriate years priorities and targets.

POLICY 25 - DEVELOPMENT OF A FINANCIAL SYSTEM

Priority will be given to developing a financial recording and expenditure system which is easily accessible to the appropriate Council Services.

POLICY 26 - FINANCIAL MONITORING

The financial systems should be capable of assisting the monitoring of the implementation of the Access Strategy.

POLICY 27- FUTURE FUNDING

Funds for the development and maintenance of access developments in Aberdeenshire post December 1999 will continue to be sourced.

Targets

- Development of a Financial System by the end of August 1997.
- **Secure funding for continuation of access strategy programme from December 1999.**

9. GLOSSARY

ACCESS AREAS

Areas within which there is the opportunity to provide facilities for quiet informal recreation. For example: picnic areas, viewpoint areas, local nature parks etc., through agreement with the landowner.

AREA ACCESS FORUM

Groups to be established in each of the six Council Areas, involving individual members of the public, landowners etc, with an interest in access to the countryside, to enable communication and action on all aspects of countryside access within the area. To be established in conjunction with the Aberdeenshire Environmental Forum wherever possible.

AREA ACCESS WORKING GROUPS

The Working Groups will steer the development of the Area Countryside Action Plans in each of the six Council Areas. They will consist of landowner groups, user groups, local Council members, Council Officers and other interested agencies as appropriate to each area.

AREA COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS ACTION PLANS

Plans focusing on local priorities for countryside access and development within each of the six Council Areas. These will complement the Framework Document to make up the Aberdeenshire Countryside Access Strategy.

COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

In this strategy, Countryside Access means the co-ordination and enabling of access into the countryside, where appropriate, for the purposes of quiet, informal recreation, and safe passage links, for all types of user groups.

FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT

Sets out the guiding principles for the provision of countryside access throughout Aberdeenshire, through a series of policies and targets.

LINKING ROUTES

Routes which will provide a connection between strategic routes and local networks.

LOCAL NETWORKS

Routes and access areas in the countryside which are easily accessible from local communities without the use of a vehicle.

STRATEGIC ROUTES

Long and middle distance routes such as the Formartine and Buchan Way, Coastal Footpaths, the Deeside Way and the Gordon Way.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Development which meets the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

APPENDIX I

APPENDIX 2

**ABERDEENSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS
STRATEGY**

**Area Countryside Access Action Plans -
Outline of Content**

Introduction and Background

There will be six Area Countryside Access Action Plans (Area CAAPs) developed for Aberdeenshire Council, one for each of the Council Areas. These Area CAAPs will be the detailed element of the Access Strategy complementing the overall Countryside Access Strategy Framework.

The Area CAAPs will focus on the specific priorities and targets for each of the Areas. These will be identified initially through the public consultation process and will be updated throughout the life of the Access Strategy through continued consultation via the Area Access Liaison Groups and Area Access Forums outlined in the Access Strategy Framework.

Framework of the Area CAAPs will be as follows - The details will be developed over the next 3-4 months through the public consultation process.

Section 1 - Review of Current Access Provision

This will include the following:

- Broad overview of the nature and quality of the local countryside resource.
- Accessibility of the local countryside by users i.e. walkers, cyclists, horse riders
 - level of public transport and vehicular access.
- Inventory of facilities:
 - Country parks
 - Estates/landowners promoting access
 - Long distant routes
 - Rights of way etc.
 - Car parks
 - Local networks - Level of development
- Areas of current environmental damage.
- Summary of landowners' views on access.
- Availability and dissemination of information and interpretative materials.
- Identification of native conservation issues and wildlife sensitivities.
- Public safety issues and accident "black spots".

Section 2 - Assessment of Demand and Future Needs.

Once the level of current provision has been identified, it will be necessary to assess the demand for access and countryside recreation and to use this information to highlight the gaps in provision and so begin to establish the priorities and targets for the Area CAAP.

The key issues that need to be identified are:

- Where the main demand pressures are likely to be.
- What future form countryside recreation is likely to take.
- What level of awareness the general public has in relation to countryside recreation.
- What the constraints on demand are at present.
- Whether the full community needs are being met.
- How people, including those with disabilities or lacking in personal transport, are getting into the countryside.
- Ensuring all types of users have adequate access (horse riders, cyclists and walkers).
- What back up facilities are required.

Section 3 - Roles of the Contributing Parties

What roles the various parties will have in the development of Action Plans and their implementation.

- General Public
- Community Councils/Community Groups
- User Groups
- Landowners
- Local Authorities
 - Planning
 - Leisure and Recreation
 - Education
 - etc.
- Other Agencies
 - Grampian Enterprise
 - SNH
 - Paths for All
 - etc.

Section 4 - What are the Area CAAPs Priorities and Targets.

- Routes
 - Strategic
 - Link Routes
 - Networks
- Interpretation and Signage
- Public Awareness
- Other

APPENDIX 3

ABERDEENSHIRE ACCESS STRATEGY

TIMESCALE

PROCESS

June 1997	<p>Report to Area Committees Access Strategy Framework and Appendices</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Aberdeenshire Access Strategy Framework2 Outline Area "Countryside Access Action Plan" (CAAP)3 Outline Public Consultation Process
	Following Approval
July - August 1997	<p>Area Committees authorise Officers to begin Public Consultation Process.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Prepare and send letter, copy of Strategy and questionnaire to Community Councils, Community Groups, User Groups, Landowner Representatives, SNH, Grampian Enterprise, Paths for All, Tourist Board etc. (Full consultation list to be drawn up)2 Prepare public consultation leaflet and questionnaire for general use, to be circulated through:<ul style="list-style-type: none">LibrariesPost OfficesLeisure FacilitiesLocal Press
Mid August - September 1997	<p>Report back to Area Committees indicating responses to date and outlining in more detail recommended next steps, i.e. series of Access Workshops (one per Area?)</p>
End September	<p>Access Workshops</p> <p>Access workshops to be organised by officers. Local member involvement .</p> <p>Participants to be invited from respondents to consultation process. (Specific question in questionnaire will ask if respondent is interested in attending a workshop).</p> <p>Workshop will be used to clarify key target areas and priorities from initial consultation exercise.</p> <p>Workshop feedback to be used by Area Committees to agree Area's Countryside Access Action Plans (CAAPs) priorities for 1998/99.</p>
November 1997	<p>Recommendations for Area CAAPs to be co-ordinated and presented in a report for Policy and Resources Committee for ratification of Aberdeenshire Council's priorities for Access implementation for 1998/99 and to endorse the Access Strategy Framework document and the six Area Countryside Access Action Plans.</p>
April 1998	<p>Implementation of Access Programme for Aberdeenshire Council and funding partners for 1998/99.</p>