

# THE CULZEAN WAY

Ayr to Girvan, South Ayrshire



## COMMUNITY ASPIRATION PLAN



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## 1. INTRODUCTION & VISION

- 1.1 This report has been compiled by South Ayrshire Paths Initiative (SAPI), a formally constituted community group with an aspiration to utilise the scenic splendour of the South Ayrshire coastline to create an attractive and safe, active-travel path suitable for all-ability pedestrians and cyclists, between Ayr and Girvan. A fuller description of SAPI's aims and activities is contained in Appendix 1 and the website can be viewed on <https://southayrshirepaths.org.uk/>
- 1.2 Locals and visitors marvel at the scenic splendour of the beautiful South Ayrshire coastline. Many businesses and other organisations have successfully capitalised on this natural landscape e.g. Culzean Castle and Country Park, Trump Turnberry Hotel & Golf Resort, Heads of Ayr Farm Park, and more than ten holiday-home parks as well as B&B's, hotels, cafes, bars and restaurants. Despite these many thriving ventures and the popular settlements at Dunure, Maidens and Girvan there is virtually no safe active travel network between any of these locations; they are effectively isolated. Visitors drive in, park their cars, move about the confines of the park or village, get back in their cars and drive to the next place – perhaps glancing at the inaccessible coastal scenery on the way and wondering why they cannot easily and safely access this part of the country on foot or bicycle.
- 1.3 The existing Ayrshire Coastal Path is a magnificent scenic route along or close to the shoreline. It is a remarkable achievement developed ten years ago by volunteers of the Rotary Club of Ayr and maintained by their squad of 'Pathminders'. It's a great way to explore this coast and well worth the effort, but it is frequently a 'rough' path and walkers need to be reasonably fit for some of the steeper sections and have the ability to plan ahead (some sections are affected by the tides) and to navigate between waymarkers.
- 1.4 Cyclists have no alternative but to use the 60mph roads with their hills, bends and fast traffic. This is risky, even for competent cyclists, and something beyond contemplation for the typical leisure cyclist.
- 1.5 The SAPI group want to improve access to the coastline south of Ayr by using, where possible, the track bed of the dismantled Maidens and Dunure Light Railway to create an easy, attractive, safe and all-abilities traffic free path between Ayr and Girvan with Culzean Castle and Country Park as its centrepiece.
- 1.6 The purpose of this report is to assist SAPI in realising our ambition to create "The Culzean Way" as a major element of the active-travel network across South Ayrshire. It should be regarded as a first-step in the process of winning community, local authority and government support for this inspiring scheme.

## 2. THE ROUTE AND ATTRACTIONS

- 2.1 This part of South Ayrshire has some of the most spectacular coastal scenery in the country, an important diversity of land and marine wildlife, a wealth of important history and ancient structures, and is, of course, the Land of Burns! Such attractions have long been recognised and explain the choice of this coastline, by individuals and organisations over centuries, for their projects, from castles to caravans and harbours to golf courses. What better location for a much-needed, unobtrusive, non-polluting, health-enhancing path?
- 2.2 The picturesque Maidens and Dunure Light Railway once ran from Alloway to Turnberry, where it serviced the world's first golfing hotel, before continuing to a main-line junction just north of Girvan. Although the entire line had a short life, partially closed in 1933 and fully closed in 1968, much of the track bed is extant and thus affords an ideal opportunity for bringing the line into re-use as an all-ability cycling and walking path. Dismantled railway routes often make ideal foundations for all-abilities paths due to their gentle inclines and curves.
- 2.3 Utilising, where possible, the old rail line route (see Appendix 2), a new path would pass very close to and be easy to link to, not only the villages of Dunure and Maidens, but also to the many attractions such as Culzean Castle, Trump Turnberry Hotel & Golf Resort, Dunure Castle, Heads of Ayr Farm Park, Craig Tara caravan park and Greenan Castle, as well as numerous other caravan and camp sites, B&Bs, pubs, cafes and restaurants (also shown in Appendix 2).
- 2.4 Northwards from Dunure, the abandoned rail line intersects National Cycle Route 7 at High Greenan from where a local cycle path has already been built on the same rail line for the short distance into Alloway. This is fortuitous since the National Trust for Scotland's Burns Cottage Exhibition Centre is in very close proximity. Thus The Culzean Way would link two significant NTS properties and popular attractions.
- 2.5 Whilst linking the more rural attractions, businesses and villages, The Culzean Way would also attract locals and visitors from the larger settlements of Ayr, Alloway and Girvan who wish to enjoy walking and/or cycling, perhaps with the option of returning by public transport (bus or Girvan & Ayr train stations where bike parking will be available).



### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 It is recognised that South Ayrshire Council has previously appreciated the potential value of a “Culzean Way” by commissioning a Feasibility Study of a route running from Doonfoot, Ayr, and southwards to the National Trust for Scotland’s Culzean Castle. Although the study report was completed in 2015 and concluded that *‘a shared-use cycling and walking route between Ayr and Culzean would be supported by a range of policies at all levels of government and be of great benefit to local people and tourists alike’*, no further progress has been made and the scheme’s current status is unknown.
- 3.2 Prior to the 2015 Feasibility Study, the national, active-travel charity, Sustrans, investigated, in 1999, a continuation of the National Cycle Route 7 between Doonfoot and the Heads of Ayr. This study was carried out for Sustrans, by their consultants, as part of the now-constructed NCR7 Millennium Project between Irvine and Ayr. Discussions were held at that time with South Ayrshire Council and potentially affected third-parties at the Heads of Ayr but, in the event, proposals for a traffic-free option in this area were not pursued.
- 3.3 Despite these and other earlier ‘ideas’ about developing a cycle path along this coastline foundering the South Ayrshire Paths Initiative group believe that the political climate is now such that The Culzean Way vision can, and should, be realised this time.



## 4. JUSTIFICATION

- 4.1 Within the context of a national government strategy, councils across the country are today advancing ambitious programmes of active-travel improvement. As emphasised in 3.1 above, creation of the Culzean Way would satisfy many governmental priorities, strategies and objectives and South Ayrshire could be argued to present more opportunity than most areas for achieving these. Much could be made of the impressive coastal scenery to enhance the leisure and associated business opportunities that this presents.
- 4.2 There has been limited success in gaining public access to this coastline in the fifty years since the railway line finally closed. However, attitudes today are changing with increasing funding from central government for active-travel (see section 8 below) and increasing recognition of the benefits to personal health, businesses and tourism. Also walking and cycling are becoming ever more popular pastimes.
- 4.3 SAPI are of the opinion that South Ayrshire is blessed with natural settings and historic attractions which surpass those of many other Scottish areas. Full advantage should be taken of these by providing safe, all-ability walking and cycling paths attracting visitors, connecting communities, and enabling access to nearby workplaces and facilities. This is particularly desirable in the more neglected rural parts of the region. Creation of The Culzean Way would not only permit direct movement between those communities on the route but also open up the possibility of numerous linked paths from less-populated settlements where people currently have no traffic-free, active-travel option available. Small business opportunities could reasonably be expected to follow.
- 4.4 Nowadays, local council areas must continually improve their network of paths in order to stay abreast of other areas and to encourage both residents and visitors to spend their leisure time and money in the area. Standing still is not an option in the current, enlightened and progressive active travel climate and highly competitive tourism market.
- 4.5 In addition to the leisure attractions identified in section 2 above, The Culzean Way would provide non-motorised, short-distance commuters with a safe travel option; an option which, in many places, simply does not currently exist. Employers too should welcome such health-giving improvements to the local travel networks and the consequent beneficial effects on their employees.



## **5. THE CHALLENGES**

- 5.1 Since this is just the start of a new examination of the feasibility of a Culzean Way, identification of obstacles and their solutions is necessarily preliminary and in outline only. The process of planning and designing a successful public path has to take into consideration the concerns of residents, farmers and business owners in the vicinity, as well as the technical difficulties. Current land-uses, farm access requirements, wildlife and possible equestrian concerns are all important factors. Creating an attractive and safe Culzean Way in a manner that respects the concerns of all parties will take willing cooperation, compromise and time.
- 5.2 In the recent absence of clear plans to restore the railway track bed to beneficial use as a public path, some landowners have understandably made other use of the land, for example, by building caravan parks and for grazing animals. Much of the track bed still exists (although in a sometimes overgrown and derelict state) and can relatively easily be brought into reuse. In SAPI's view, potential difficulties can be overcome with reasonable political will and community involvement.

## **6. STAKEHOLDERS & PRELIMINARY CONSULTATIONS**

- 6.1 SAPI have identified the principal parties who are likely important players in any serious attempt to progress the building of the Culzean Way - for example: South Ayrshire Council, Ayrshire Roads Alliance, Sustrans, Scottish Natural Heritage, National Trust for Scotland, numerous commercial enterprises (big and small), and individual landowners. (see Appendix 3).
- 6.2 South Ayrshire Council (SAC) is fully aware of the existence of SAPI and have been informed of our ambition for the Culzean Way. Indeed, SAC have made the 2015 Feasibility Study available to SAPI. Recently, SAPI has supplied input to SAC's Local Plan Development Revisions by proposing that the notional route of the Culzean Way be protected from future development intrusion which could be detrimental to its creation. It is to be hoped that SAC will recognise the merit in this proposal for the reasons presented within this report.
- 6.3 Ayrshire Roads Alliance (ARA) is also aware of SAPI's interest in the Culzean Way.
- 6.4 Sustrans too know of SAPI's vision of the Culzean Way and are believed to be likely to support such a scheme.
- 6.5 Introductory discussions have been held with NTS local management personnel at both Culzean Castle and the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum. These initial talks were encouraging to the extent that both have indicated their enthusiasm for such a project. The RBBM Operations manager, in a note to SAPI, stated that *"we are very much in favour of..... encouraging active travel to the museum. The old railway line.....is a great asset for the area"*.
- 6.6 Community Councils in the near vicinity of the route have been made aware of SAPI's proposal and reaction has been generally favourable. After a SAPI presentation to a meeting of Alloway & Doonfoot CC it was recorded that the CC *"welcomed the SAPI ambitions"* and were *"supportive of the Group's objectives"*.
- 6.7 Other essential and potential consultees, including wildlife and countryside organisations, are also listed in Appendix 3.

## **7. NEW STUDY PROPOSAL**

- 7.1 SAPI propose that the 2015 Feasibility Study is updated and that it be extended to include the southern section between Culzean and Girvan. Simultaneously, preliminary discussions should be entered into with potential stakeholders and other interested or affected parties. SAPI would welcome participation in this process.



## 8. FUNDING

- 8.1 Local councils are under increasing pressure financially, but they are also under pressure to get more people walking and cycling by making active travel more attractive and easier to access. There are now many projects being developed throughout the country to create and improve path networks to support active travel and to attract visitors. Increasingly funding for such projects comes from central government initiatives, transport organisations and charities like Sustrans as well as from a range of smaller grant schemes.
- 8.2 The Scottish Government has pledged, in its budget statement (14 December 2017) to double its investment in active and sustainable travel from £40 million to £80 million in 2018/19. In its 2017/18 Programme for Scotland “A Nation with Ambition” it has committed to building on previous success by promoting, through digital and traditional methods, specifically “*the south of Scotland and Ayrshire as a tourism destination for coastal and forest tourism activities, with enhanced visitor experiences, development of walking opportunities and cycling routes*”.
- 8.3 It is recognised that such funding considerations are critical to the advancement of The Culzean Way and that SAC budget constraints are ever tightening. In light of this SAPI proposes that it works jointly with the council in developing a workable scheme and in identifying and raising funds to realise their joint ambition.
- 8.4 SAPI proposes the adoption of a strategy where the long term vision is an all-abilities path between Ayr and Girvan, but anticipates that the route will be developed in progressive sections to enable a reliable flow of funding.

## 9. SUMMARY

- 9.1 Active travel is becoming ever more a priority in people’s lives and is now a significant element in government transport strategies at both national and local levels. South Ayrshire’s opportunities in this regard are second to none. This Community Aspiration Plan for the creation of The Culzean Way addresses and aligns with the objectives of these strategies and can demonstrate substantial potential benefits to communities, individuals, and businesses alike.
- 9.2 There is already an existing blueprint for The Culzean Way using, wherever practicable, the line of the former Maidens and Dunure Light Railway. This provides an opportunity to capitalise on the original engineering work and to gain huge benefit from a generally level route to access the scenic splendour of coastal South Ayrshire. Although there are a number of significant challenges to be addressed, land negotiations and funding being prominent, this document has set out, in outline, the reasons why these should now be met.

9.3 With increasing national investment in active travel, recognition of its benefits and increasing demand for walking and cycling paths, South Ayrshire Paths Initiative (SAPI) believes now is the time to open up this coastline for all, and not just car drivers. With political will and community involvement The Culzean Way can become a reality and a major asset to South Ayrshire. SAPI propose that the 2015 Feasibility Study is revised and updated to reflect current active-travel trends and to satisfy community ambitions.

9.4 This year, 2018, is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the closure of the Maidens & Dunure Light Railway Line. How appropriate it would be to use this significant coincidence to kick start a reopening of this travel corridor.

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## **APPENDIX 1: SOUTH AYRSHIRE PATHS INITIATIVE - ABOUT US**

### **Who we are**

We are a group of volunteers dedicated to promoting the development, maintenance and awareness of safe paths for all in South Ayrshire including walkers, cyclists and limited-mobility users.

Our line of reasoning is simple - build, maintain and promote safe and attractive paths and people will use them. Try to promote active travel without safe routes and most people will give up early on, as statistics and many studies over the years have shown.

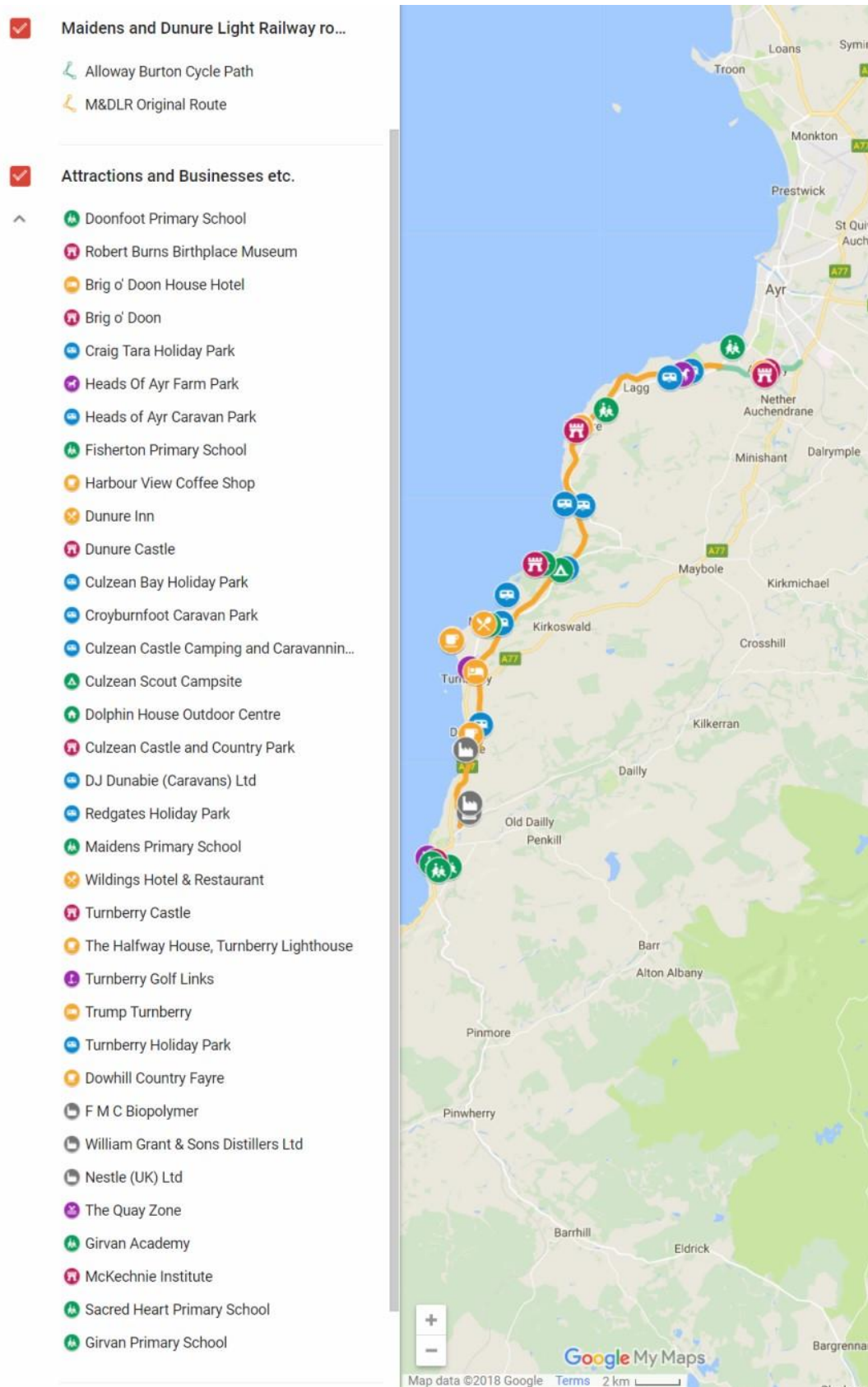
We want to work with local planning and infrastructure authorities (e.g. South Ayrshire Council and Ayrshire Roads Alliance), Active Travel organisations (e.g. Sustrans, Living Streets, Paths for All) and other organisations that can help turn our vision into reality.

We aim to achieve this by identifying potential paths for development, encouraging safe path and junction design, helping to create welcoming greener pathways, highlighting barriers and maintenance issues, promoting awareness and benefits of active travel

### **Our Mission**

- To develop, promote and access funding for new cycling and walking routes in South Ayrshire.
- To bring benefits to communities by connecting people and places
- To improve and develop cycling and walking-friendly access for local people and visitors throughout South Ayrshire and the surrounding area.
- To enable cyclists and walkers to have safe access to residential areas, shops, public streets and facilities.
- To develop a principal network of mapped, signed and promoted routes to a consistent standard, using a mixture of traffic-free routes and quiet roads.
- To connect settlements of all sizes – housing estates, villages and towns.
- To assist people to access greenspaces and South Ayrshire's inspiring landscapes.
- To gain access to local and national funding for improvements in active travel path infrastructure.

## APPENDIX 2: Route of Dismantled Railway and Places of Interest



### **APPENDIX 3: Other Stakeholders**

South Ayrshire Council

Ayrshire Roads Alliance

Sustrans

Farmers and landowners

Rotary Club of Ayr (Ayrshire Coastal Path)

Community Councils:

- Alloway & Doonfoot
- Dunure
- Kirkoswald, Maidens & Turnberry
- Girvan & District

Residents along the proposed route

Scottish Natural Heritage

Historic Scotland

Primary Schools (Fisherton, Maidens etc.)

Girvan Community Hospital

Scottish Wildlife Trust

RSPB