

Green Network Concordat with Central Scotland Green Network**Report by John Blair, Director, Resources****1 Purpose of Report**

This report seeks Members' approval for a concordat between the Council and the Central Scotland Green Network Partnership Board, providing a public statement of support by both the Council and Central Scotland Green Network to the delivery in Midlothian of Green Networks. A draft concordat is attached as an appendix to this report.

2 Background

- 2.1 Scottish Natural Heritage has approached the Council asking if it would wish to sign a concordat on the delivery of Green Networks in Midlothian. Scottish Natural Heritage has also approached other local authorities seeking similar concordats.
- 2.2 Scottish Government's National Planning Framework 2 introduced the Central Scotland Green Network as one of its 14 national development projects. The Green Network is described as a strategic network of woodland and other habitats, active travel routes, and links between green space, watercourses and waterways that provide enhanced settings for development and other land uses and improved opportunities for outdoor recreation and cultural activity.
- 2.3 National Planning Framework 2 sets out the need and benefits of a Central Scotland Green Network:
 - Delivering a better environment in Central Scotland will help to ensure that it can compete economically at a European and global scale.
 - The creation of a Central Scotland Green Network will complement improvements in rail, road and communications infrastructure, making Central Scotland a more attractive place to live in, do business and to visit.
 - Improving the health and resilience of the natural environment will help it to adapt to climate change.
 - A well-planned increase in woodland cover can substantially improve the landscape settings of towns and cities, bring vacant and derelict land into beneficial use, improve biodiversity and amenity, and help absorb carbon dioxide. Improvements can also be made to networks of other habitats, including wetlands, to counter fragmentation and assist species migration.
 - The development of footpath and cycleway networks and other facilities and attractions will contribute to a more sustainable transport network and expand the range of recreational opportunities close to major centres of population, encouraging active travel and healthier lifestyles.
- 2.4 The Main Issues Report for Midlothian Local Development Plan is currently the subject of public consultation until 31 August 2013. This

plan includes the concept of Green Networks and consults upon the implications for the development strategy of the Midlothian Local Development Plan and how the Green Network can be delivered in Midlothian.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

There are no resource implications arising directly from this report. The concordat itself does not commit the Council to expenditure. Scottish Natural Heritage has informed the Council that the Central Scotland Green Network Support Unit has a budget for producing the signed concordat, assisting with public relations of a formal signing ceremony and producing leaflets on the Green Network for the Council's use.

3.2 Risk

There are 19 local authorities within the area covered by the Central Scotland Green Network, many of whom have signed concordats. The Council's risk of reputational damage by not signing would be mitigated through approval of the Central Scotland Green Network Partnership.

3.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☒ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☒ Sustainable growth

3.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The new Midlothian Local Development Plan will set the development strategy and planning policy framework for the delivery of the Green Network in Midlothian. The concordat will act as a concise public declaration of the Council's support for green networks and their implementation in Midlothian.

3.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Not relevant to this report.

3.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

It is not proposed that there is any direct community or other stakeholder involvement in the signing of the concordat.

The development of the Green Network in Midlothian is the subject of public consultation through the production of the new Midlothian Local Development Plan, and in particular the Main Issues Report for that document, which is subject to a public consultation between 1 May and 31 August 2013.

3.7 Ensuring Equalities

There is no direct relevance to this report. However an Equalities and Rights Impact Assessment was prepared in support of the Midlothian Local Development Plan Main Issues Report.

3.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

There is no direct relevance to this report. However, a framework for the Midlothian Green Network, and its delivery, will be set out in the Midlothian Local Development Plan. The Midlothian Local Development Plan will also be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Appraisal.

The Green Network is raised within the Main Issues Report of the Midlothian Local Plan. The Main Issues Report is a 'strategic action' requiring Strategic Environmental Assessment. Following scoping and consultation with the Strategic Environmental Assessment Consultation Authorities (Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Historic Scotland), environmental assessment of the Main Issues Report has been undertaken and an Environmental Report has been prepared for consultation.

Habitats Regulations Appraisal has been carried out on the Main Issues Report, through screening out any requirement for Appropriate Assessment (in relation to significant environmental effects on European Protected sites). Both the Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Habitats Regulations Appraisal will be kept under review during the plan-making process. Scottish Ministers have been notified, as required, of the intended consultation timescales which had previously been agreed with the Consultation Authorities.

The Midlothian Local Development Plan will help to implement the SESplan Strategic Development Plan which is based on the principles of a sustainable development strategy. It has been subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Appraisal.

3.9 IT Issues

There are no IT issues arising from this report.

4 Recommendation

- 4.1** Cabinet is recommended to agree to sign the concordat between the Council and the Central Scotland Green Network Partnership Board on the development of Green Networks in Midlothian in the terms set out at the Appendix to this report.

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**Background Papers: Please see Appendix: Draft Concordat between
Midlothian Council and the Central Scotland Green Network Partnership
Board**

APPENDIX

Draft Concordat between Midlothian Council and the Central Scotland Green Network Partnership Board

We acknowledge that

- We must have places that are nationally and internationally competitive if we want our communities to thrive in the future.
- Our environment makes a vital contribution to our economic wellbeing, our health and our quality of life.
- We need to improve our environment so that it delivers all that it can for the people who live and work in Central Scotland.
- Change at the scale proposed can only take place over a long period with sustained resourcing.

We welcome

- The government's commitment to the Central Scotland Green Network as expressed through its inclusion as a National Development in Scotland's National Planning Framework.
- The Network concept as set out in the Network Vision.
- The opportunity the creation of the Network provides to deliver our economic, social and environmental aims.
- The opportunity to develop and enhance our partnerships with other Local Authorities, National Agencies, National Governmental Organisations and communities in delivering Network ambitions.

We commit from this date to

- Adhere to the Network principles expressed in the Network Vision.
- Embed the Network in all relevant policies, strategies and plans.
- Develop and enhance our partnership work to realise the Network.
- Support the work of the Lothian and Fife Green Network Partnership as part of the Council's commitment to the Network principles of partnership working.
- Ensure the Network is integrated, as appropriate, into development plans, development frameworks, masterplans and design briefs.
- Enhance connections between places in towns and countryside areas in a manner that can be used by both people and wildlife.
- Identify opportunities and priority areas for Network enhancement to target available resources and facilitate its delivery.