

# Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 8 August 2024

## Safety of the Off-Street Path Network

Executive/routine  
Wards

Routine  
All

### 1. Recommendations

---

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Culture and Communities Committee notes this update on the safety of the off-street path network and the planned next steps.

**Gareth Barwell**

Service Director, Operational Services

Contact: Steven Cuthill, Parks, Openspace Development and Visitor Services Manager

E-mail: [steven.cuthill@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:steven.cuthill@edinburgh.gov.uk) | Tel: 0131 529 5043

## Safety of the Off-Street Path Network

### 2. Executive Summary

---

- 2.1 This report responds to a [motion](#) by Councillor Thornley about improving safety of the off-street path network including initial exploration of options, analysis of lighting, and plans using allocated funding.

### 3. Background

---

- 3.1 The off-street path network is well-used and are considered important routes that encourage walking, wheeling, and cycling. It is also an important green corridor throughout the city and is home to a variety of wildlife and biodiversity and should be safe for users and residents.
- 3.2 However, issues of antisocial behaviour do arise. The route can be used by those involved in criminal activity (such as house breaking) as well as antisocial activities (such as riding motorcycles). Dog fouling, graffiti, flytipping of waste, and irresponsible disposal of litter also impact people's enjoyment of the network.
- 3.3 For many years there has been a lack of investment in the maintenance of the network, especially beyond the verges of the path network. Issues with litter, dumping, overgrown vegetation, dilapidation of infrastructure (e.g., fences and walls), are evident.
- 3.4 On 29 February 2024, Committee approved a motion by Councillor Thornley that requested a report in two cycles outlining:
- 3.4.1 Which parts of the off-street path network are currently lit, and to what standard, and which parts are not lit;
  - 3.4.2 What options are available beyond lighting to improve the safety of the off-street path network, such as CCTV or cutting back overgrown foliage to improve sightlines; and
  - 3.4.3 How any additional monies allocated for the 2024/25 budget for the purpose of improving the safety of the off-street path network can be best spent.

## 4. Main report

---

- 4.1 Significant portions of the off-street path network were former railway line routes around the city and have since been adopted by the Council for maintenance.
- 4.2 Much of the route is tarmacadam and some entry and exit points are less accessible due to steps rather than ramps (due to the former railway embankments and cuttings affecting the topography).

### **Street lighting**

- 4.3 The extent of the off-street path network that is lit and unlit is shown in Appendix 1. Most of the network within the city is lit, with more rural and perhaps less-used routes remaining unlit. Approximately 35 miles of the off-street path network are currently unlit.
- 4.4 Where new lighting is required for the off-street path network, it should follow the standards set out in the latest revisions of BS 5489, EN 13201, and the Institution of Lighting Professionals' PLG23 Lighting for Cycling Infrastructure. Typically, such routes would be illuminated using either 5 or 6m high columns spaced between 25 and 30m apart with a post-top LED luminaire.
- 4.5 Based on current estimates, it would cost in excess of £5m to install lighting along unlit routes (excluding power connections and ongoing revenue costs), which is significantly outside the scope of the current funding available.

### **Improving the safety of the off-street network**

- 4.6 An initial desk-based exercise is being carried out over the summer 2024 to identify crime and antisocial behaviour hotspots to prioritise for more detailed site-based assessment. Customer enquiries and comments are also being reviewed, and some public engagement will be completed to identify safety issues and concerns.
- 4.7 While some safety issues will be around user behaviour (e.g., user conflict, speed of cyclists, dog fouling, etc), there will also be physical safety improvements required. Some potential areas of improvement are likely to include:
  - 4.7.1 Identifying locations for permanent CCTV or adding new poles or sockets for temporary installation of CCTV (using mobile cameras);
  - 4.7.2 Identifying opportunities for path and step/ramp upgrades, especially at entrances/exits along the network to make the route more welcoming and increase accessibility;
  - 4.7.3 Checking and replacing, where necessary, waymarking and wayfinding information to help users navigate the network;
  - 4.7.4 The potential to carry out regular on-foot and cycle patrols of the network to inspect and identify safety issues and also offer advice and assistance to users to encourage shared use;

- 4.7.5 Improvements to maintenance of fences, walls, drainage, handrails, and other infrastructure, and investment in their repair, refurbishment, and replacement; and
- 4.7.6 Creating a rich and diverse habitat to support biodiversity across the network to support nature recovery.

### **Biodiversity and vegetation management**

- 4.8 The off-street network is an important linear route that provides habitat connections for wildlife. Trees and understory, grassland meadows, wildflowers, drainage ditches, hedgerows, etc., provide a range of habitats.
- 4.9 Funding has been allocated for the recruitment of grounds maintenance and arborists to undertake maintenance of vegetation and overhanging trees along the off-street path network. The primary focus of this will be to ensure cyclists and pedestrians are able to use the routes safely by cutting back vegetation at entrances/exits and improving sightlines, and pruning trees overhanging the paths.
- 4.10 Biodiversity will be enhanced through planting more trees, wildflowers, and creating meadow areas where it is appropriate to do so.

## **5. Next Steps**

---

- 5.1 Seeking further improvements to the network supports the Council's aim to reduce car usage in the city through investing in developing safe and attractive alternative routes for active travel.
- 5.2 The next steps include:
  - 5.2.1 Completing the desktop data gathering exercise to identify areas of safety concern. This will include liaising with Police Scotland, Community Safety and others with data relating to crime, antisocial behaviour, etc., to identify key hotspots to develop more detailed solutions;
  - 5.2.2 Based on the data gathered, developing proposals for upgrading and improving lighting and/or installing CCTV can be considered with detailed cost estimates developed for particular routes prioritised for investment;
  - 5.2.3 Establishing a dedicated maintenance team to carry out vegetation management and considering links to other projects that support nature recovery and climate adaption; and
  - 5.2.4 Working with biodiversity and ecology officers to prioritise and enhance habitats with the aim of improving existing areas, create links to other green spaces, and create new areas.
- 5.3 Combined, these actions will help to prioritise resources to areas of most need to improve safety on the off-street path network.
- 5.4 Committee will be kept updated on progress with these actions through the Business Bulletin.

## 6. Financial impact

---

- 6.1 A revenue budget of £75,000 is available to undertake the initial survey and assessment. A capital budget of £600,000 was awarded for purchase of machinery to support biodiversity and CCTV/lighting in the off-road network roughly split equally between machinery purchase (currently in process of being procured) and investment in lighting and other improvements outlined in paragraph 4.7 above.
- 6.2 Further resources maybe be required to ensure all of the off-road network is lit. Once areas of work have been identified, existing budgets may be used in areas of active travel, roads and footway investment, and parks development to target specific tasks and take projects forward.
- 6.3 Work with partners on environmental improvements will also be investigated and any grants or other funds will be explored.

## 7. Equality and Poverty Impact

---

- 7.1 The safety of the off-street path network is important for all users irrespective of ability.
- 7.2 Having a safe, green, and attractive path network will hopefully encourage more walking, wheeling, and cycling, which in turn provides health and wellbeing benefits.

## 8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

---

- 8.1 As a public body, the Council has statutory duties relating to climate emissions and biodiversity. The Council

*“must, in exercising its functions, act in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of emissions reduction targets”*

(Climate Change (Emissions Reductions Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019), and

*“in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions”*

(Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004)

- 8.2 The City of Edinburgh Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and committed to work towards a target of net zero emissions by 2030 for both city and corporate emissions and embedded this as a core priority of the Council Business Plan 2023-27. The Council also declared a Nature Emergency in 2023.

### **Environmental Impacts**

- 8.3 There may be a need to reduce or remove vegetation to improve sightlines or support better illumination of the network from lighting columns. To minimise the impact on wildlife, any reduction or removal of trees or understorey vegetation will be assessed by an ecologist. Wherever possible, green waste will be chipped and

used as mulch rather than removed offsite and dead or cut timber will be left to create habitat for invertebrates.

- 8.4 Care will be taken in areas close to water and where evidence suggests the presence of protected or sensitive species (e.g., bats, badgers).
- 8.5 Additional tree planting will also infill gaps caused by removal of dead or dying Ash and other trees. Developing and enhancing the natural environment will help to improve biodiversity, aid nature recovery, and contribute to Council objectives such as Edinburgh Million Tree City.
- 8.6 Any new lighting will be LED to reduce the amount of power consumption in line with the Council's approach to street lighting.

## **9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact**

---

- 9.1 There can be some impact on local residents relating to issues of antisocial behaviour. Working with Police Scotland and Community Safety to address some of the main areas of concern may reduce impact on neighbouring residents and businesses and their property.
- 9.2 Improved lighting and provision of CCTV may improve people's perception of safety and help reduce crime and improve legal enforcement.
- 9.3 Improving biodiversity and natural habitats will contribute to the Council's objectives around nature recovery and climate adaptation.

## **10. Background reading/external references**

---

- 10.1 None.

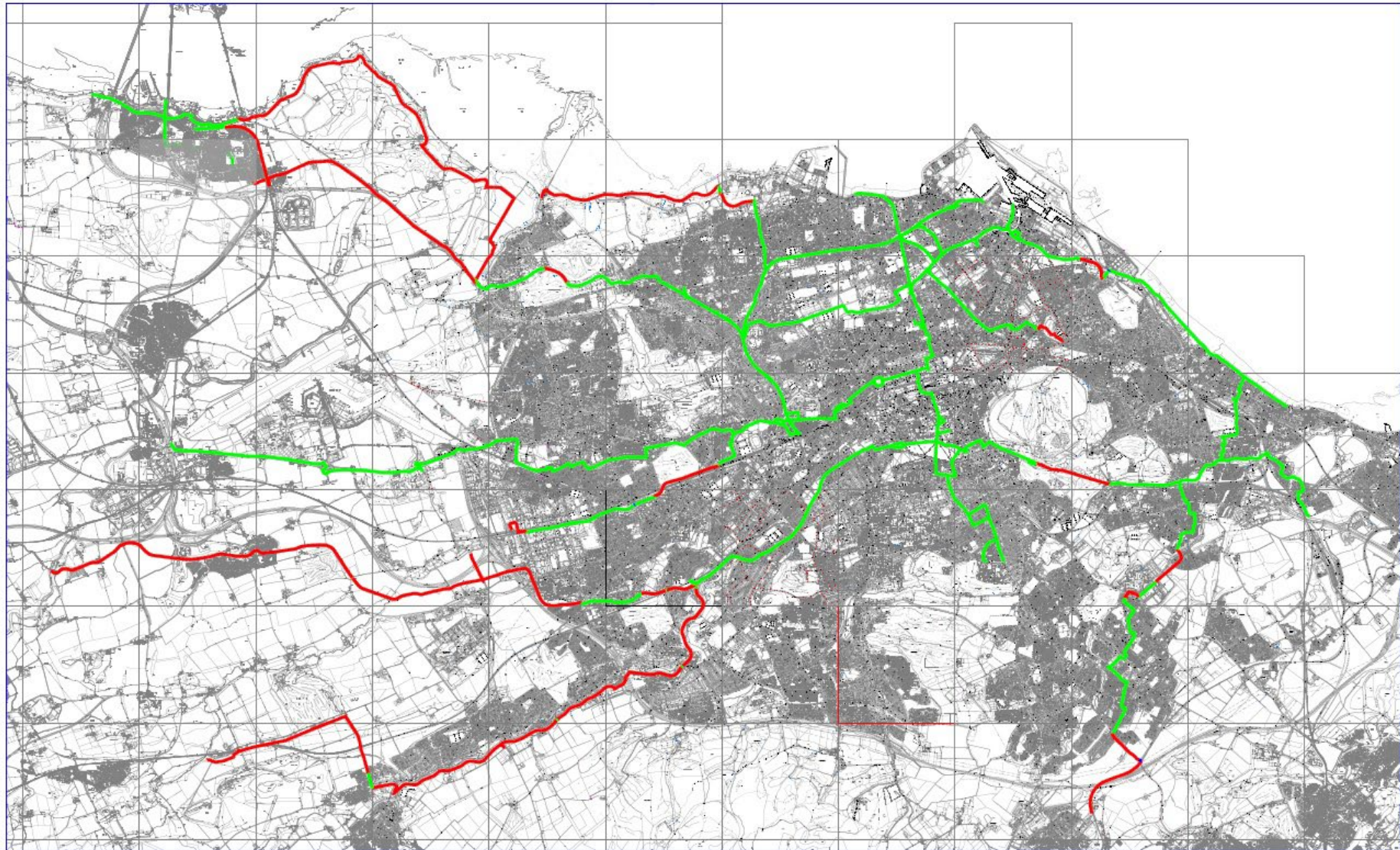
## **11. Appendices**

---

Appendix 1 – Map - Off-Street Path Network – Extent of Lighting



Off-Street Path Network – Extent of Lighting



— Routes (unlit)

— Routes (lit)