

Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee

2pm, Wednesday, 20 January 2021

Report on sustainable transport and active travel to the Pentland Hills Regional Park

Executive/routine	Routine
Wards	Pentland Hills
Council Commitments	

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Committee supports the measures proposed to improve sustainable access to the regional park and mitigate the impact of car parking displacement in the surrounding area. These are:
 - 1.1.1 Improving paths from local communities to the regional park
 - 1.1.2 Providing a shuttle bus service from the local communities

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Report

Report on sustainable transport and active travel to the Pentland Hills Regional Park

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The recent health crisis has highlighted a range of growing traffic management pressures on the Pentland Hills Regional Park (PHRP), notably a significant rise in the use of car parks, causing overflow onto adjacent access roads. This report addresses this issue, proposing a series of actions that, if implemented, will help limit the impact by improving sustainable access to the regional park.

3. Background

- 3.1 According to the 2005/6 Pentland Hills Regional Park Visitor Survey, 85% of visitors to the Park arrive by private vehicle. The car parks regularly reach capacity and cars often park inconsiderately, blocking access for farm machinery, emergency vehicles or local residents. Visitor's experience is also impacted by the lack of car parking spaces available when they reach the PHRP. Providing alternative ways to visit the regional park will encourage visitors to leave their vehicles at home and help reduce these problems.
- 3.2 The regional park has always encouraged use of sustainable transport to get to the hills. A leaflet produced by the PHRP called "How to get to the Pentland Hills Regional Park by Bus" has been available since 2006, it is also downloadable from the PHRP website and a bus timetable is on display at Flotterstone. Currently, two bus routes come from Edinburgh: the No.4 to Hillend and the 101/2 to Flotterstone. A further four routes come within a ten-minute walk of the park but require lengthy walks along busy country roads with no or limited pavement provision.
- 3.3 During 1997/8 a shuttle bus service called "The Drover" was run by the PHRP service to provide a way for people without cars to get to the hills and help alleviate parking problems. It ran twice a day every Sunday between 7 December 1997 and 30 August 1998, starting at Hillend, via Dreghorn and Bonaly, along the A70 to Little Vantage, stopping at Harlaw and Threipmuir. It would then go back to Hillend and along the A702 to West Linton before returning to Hillend. For that period, it had a total of 263 passengers, an average of approximately 7 passengers a day. Passengers were charged £1 or £2 depending on how far they were travelling. The daily cost paid by the

PHRP service for the minibus and driver was initially £107.50 then £137.50 per day. The fares were kept by the Regional Park, which totalled £358.50. It is likely the service stopped due to the cost of subsidising the service.

- 3.4 There are several settlements within walking distance of the Regional Park: Balerno, Currie, Juniper Green, Bonaly, Swanston, Fairmilehead, Bilston and Penicuik. There are paths from these places to the Park and 17% of park users walk or run and 12% cycle (2020 Public Engagement results) to the Regional Park (which is a change from the 2005/6 visitor survey which recorded that only 3% walked and 8% cycled).
- 3.5 A combination of all the measures mentioned (a shuttle bus, an improved bus service and more or better paths to the Park) would not only be more sustainable, but also make the Park more accessible to those less-well-off.

4. Main report

Improving paths from local communities to the regional park

- 4.1 In June 2010, Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust completed a report on paths from Balerno to Threipmuir which presented five different options, each having benefits and disadvantages (Appendix 1). The cost varied from £80,000 to £124,000. No funding has been found for this project.
- 4.2 In 2011 a report was produced by Land Use Consultants for the regional park on “Improving Access Routes Between the Pentland Hills Regional Park and Surrounding Communities”. The report highlighted that several routes already existed around the regional park, many however needed improvements and it recommended that a number of routes were improved: Selm Muir to Little Vantage and Thieves Road; Water of Leith to Bonaly Country Park; Redford Road via Redford Wood to Bonaly; Bush to Flotterstone via Glencorse Burn; Penicuik to Carnethy via Coates and Kirk Road. The first three routes have subsequently been improved. Routes from Currie and Balerno were not suggested for improvement, as improvements were already under consideration (Appendix 2).
- 4.3 The Friends of the Pentland Hills and the Water of Leith Conservation Trust are in discussion with Rosebery Estates on how to best fund and deliver a route from Currie to Harlaw, known as the Lymphoy path.
- 4.4 Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust has recently completed The Pentland to Portobello Active Travel Feasibility Study, which aims to create a new pathway from Lothian Burn near Swanston to the coast at Portobello. The proposed route will go through Burdiehouse, Liberton, Gilmerton, the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary at Little France and Niddrie, before arriving at the sea at Joppa. The project will provide the South East of Edinburgh with a green way which will mirror the Water of Leith Walkway, providing a welcoming safe route to travel off-road to and from the countryside.
- 4.5 A funding application has been submitted to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) round 3 to improve three paths all at the edge of the Regional Park. Two of

these are presently used by visitors accessing the Park sustainably: to Bonaly Country Park and to Harlaw Visitor Centre. The outcome of the application will be known on 11th January 2021.

4.6 Bike racks have been constructed at all the major entrances to the Regional Park. This encourages people to cycle by providing a safe lockable place to leave their bike. Some visitors may feel happy about cycling to the Park but not riding in the Park, due to its rough or fragile path surfaces. Bike racks have been provided at the car parks listed below and more are planned to be put in at Harlaw and Bonaly Country Park shortly:

- Flotterstone x3
- Hillend x1
- Swanston x3
- Bonaly x1
- Harlaw x1
- Threipmuir x6

4.7 A visitor survey carried out at the three main car parks in 2018 showed the following results of how visitors travel to the Regional Park:

	Flotterstone	Threipmuir	Harlaw
Private vehicle	85%	81%	78%
Cycle	1%	2%	10%
Walk	6%	7%	10%
Horse	0%	0%	0%

4.8 Between 06/11/2020 to 04/12/2020 the Pentland Hills Regional Park held an online public engagement exercise. The engagement centred around anti-social behaviour and traffic management problems which had been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 and explored solutions around the following themes:

- creation of a warden position, eco-campsite and toilets at Harlaw Reservoir
- improvement of current parking provision at Threipmuir, Harlaw, Bonaly and Flotterstone, including minor extensions and provision of toilet facilities, and
- improvement of footpaths and active travel options for those wishing to access the regional park.

4.9 Question 5 asked “How do you generally travel to the regional park?” It received 1628 responses:

Option	Total	Percent
Private vehicle	982	52.46%
Public Transport	90	4.81%
Cycle	222	11.86%
Run or walk	316	16.88%
Horse	18	0.96%
Not Answered	244	13.03%

4.10 Although the impact of the recent pandemic may have influenced behaviours, it suggests that an increasing percentage of park users are choosing Active Travel as their means of access. It has certainly been noted by staff that many more people are walking and cycling to the park (e.g. up Mansfield Road, Kirkgate and Bonaly Road). Possibly some of the new visitors do not have cars or during the current pandemic people are focusing on their health and opted to make their journey to the park a part of their physical exercise.

4.11 Question 11 asked “Would you use a path instead of a vehicle to access the regional park if we were able to create more path links?” It received 1851 responses and indicates significant support for additional active travel infrastructure:

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	1184	63.25%
No	312	16.67%
Not sure	355	18.96%
Not Answered	21	1.12%

4.12 Question 12 of the 2020 Public Engagement exercise asked respondents to comment on the proposal to upgrade key access paths. 931 comments were made, which can be grouped into seven themes:

1. Roads are dangerous to walk/cycle/horse ride on (e.g. Kirkgate, Harlaw Road, Mansfield Road, A702) and could be made safer.
2. Create new off-road paths (e.g. Bonaly car park from bypass, up length of Bavelaw Burn, from Mansfield Road) and improve present off-road paths (e.g. Poet’s Glen).
3. New paths need to be suitable for all – walkers, cyclists, buggies, horses etc.
4. Advertise present walking routes to the regional park.
5. More cycle racks required.
6. Some would not walk to the regional park as it is too far (distance, health reasons, with children etc).
7. Some are against making more paths to the regional park. A variety of reasons were provided: the countryside should be left as it is; money would be better spent elsewhere (including on paths within the regional park); there are already plenty of paths to the regional park; more paths to the park would mean more erosion/anti-social behaviour; paths will not stop people coming by car or would mean car drivers would park at the start of these paths and cause problems there.

4.13 There is a high percentage of visitors that say they would walk to the Regional park if paths were available. Improvement or creation of paths to the places where car parking is an issue and where there is a nearby larger population should therefore be given priority.

- Penicuik to Flotterstone
- Bonaly to Bonaly Country Park

- Currie/Balerno to Harlaw
- Balerno to Threipmuir

Extending present bus services

- 4.14 Due to the narrow nature of the road and lack of turning place, the only bus route which could provide a better service to the Regional Park is the No. 4.
- 4.15 In 2019, Lothian Buses were approached regarding the extension of the No. 4 bus route to Flotterstone. For a 7 day a week operation they would require full financial backing of £450k to £510k per annum from a third party such as a local authority. A Sunday operation was something that they might consider (although it is not easy to find drivers for Sundays).
- 4.16 The current future plan is that the No. 4 bus will terminate at the new development “Destination Hillend” (retail, hotel opportunities to the Hillend Snowsports Centre). These proposals may require investment in new or improved entry paths at Hillend.
- 4.17 The Covid-19 experience at Lothian Buses has seen a core bus network maintained using government funding. They advise that they do not feel that it would be prudent, at the current time, to pursue an extension to Flotterstone/Penicuik.

Providing a shuttle bus service from the local communities

- 4.18 Question 9 of the 2020 Public Engagement exercise asked respondents “Would you use a 'Park and Ride' facility to the regional park from Hermiston, Ingliston or Straiton?” It received 1872 responses:

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	378	20.19%
No	1470	78.53%
Not Answered	24	1.28%

- 4.19 The responses to this question can be grouped into five themes:

For those supporting a Park and Ride:

- A bus service that visits all access points would help reduce pressure on car parks and allow walkers to do linear walks rather than circular routes. Current bus routes don't take walkers close enough to the regional park.
- A park and ride need to be a regular service (e.g. every 20 mins on busy days).
- If a shuttle is provided it needs to be same price as parking fee on site. Must allow dog owners to use the service.

And those against:

- Park & ride / public transport means long waits, longer journey times, waiting outside, unlikely to allow bikes, difficult for families, costs more than a car.
- There are already buses that can take you very near all walks.

- 4.20 If a shuttle bus was provided it is likely that it would probably be used by a limited number of visitors. It is unlikely that it would help reduce congestion at car parks but it would be a more sustainable way for visitors to get to the Regional Park and may make the park more accessible to a wider variety of visitors.
- 4.21 Estimated prices have been obtained for two routes (see appendix 3). “Route One” visiting Currie, Balerno, Harlaw and Threipmuir would cost £265 per day. “Route Two”, similar to the Pentland Drover (i.e. around the regional park stopping at the main car parks and the surrounding towns) would cost £345 per day. The only likely source of funding for this would be revenue from car park charges, however these car parking charges are also required in order to manage pressures within the existing operational budget for the PHRP.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 There are already some paths that link the Regional Park with surrounding communities. These should be publicised more (e.g. production and distribution of a leaflet and made available on the PHRP website). Some need to be better signposted in agreement with the landowners and some improved (e.g. Poet’s Glen).
- 5.2 It is clear that many residents of Currie and Balerno drive to Harlaw and Threipmuir car parks rather than walk/cycle/ride. The priority should be to provide routes to and from these places. Landowner approval is required, and funding will need to be secured.
- 5.3 Advice from the City of Edinburgh Council Roads team would be sought on whether the construction of a pavement for pedestrians to use along both Harlaw Road and Mansfield Road is possible. As well as making these roads safer for pedestrians and cyclists by the reducing speed limit from 60mph and some form of segregation for cyclists.
- 5.4 Various groups (Balerno Village Trust, Friends of the Pentlands, Water of Leith Trust, Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust) have an interest in improving routes to the Regional Park and these groups should be encouraged to work together to increase their chances of success. The PHRP team will set up working groups to progress access improvements.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Most of the measures proposed will have financial implications – both capital and revenue. Further work is required to determine the costs of each proposed measure and how the required resources can be secured.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 An initial meeting to explore solutions was held with Ward members within the City of Edinburgh Council and stakeholder representatives on 5 August 2020.
- 7.2 PHRP Joint Committee held on 8 September 2020.
- 7.3 PHRP Consultative Forum on 27 October 2020.
- 7.4 PHRP Public Engagement Exercise from 06/11/2020 to 04/12/2020.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [“How to get to the Pentland Hills Regional Park by Bus”](#) Leaflet produced by the Pentland Hills Regional Park
- 8.2 “Improving Access Routes Between the Pentland Hills Regional Park and Surrounding Communities” produced by Land Use Consultant, 2011.
- 8.3 “Paths from Balerno to Threipmuir” by Lothian and Borders Greenspace Trust, June 2010
- 8.4 “2005-06 Pentland Hills Visitor Survey”
- 8.5 “2014 Pentland Hills Visitor Survey”
- 8.6 “2018 Pentland Hills car parks Visitor survey”
- 8.7 [“The Pentland to Portobello Active Travel Feasibility Study” by Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – Five options of routes from Balerno to Threipmuir
- 9.2 Appendix 2 - Maps extract from “Improving Access Routes Between the Pentland Hills Regional Park and Surrounding Communities” produced by Land Use Consultant, 2011
- 9.3 Appendix 3 - Providing a shuttle bus service from the local communities, map of routes

Appendix 1

Five options of routes from Balerno to Threipmuir, maps

1. Safest Route

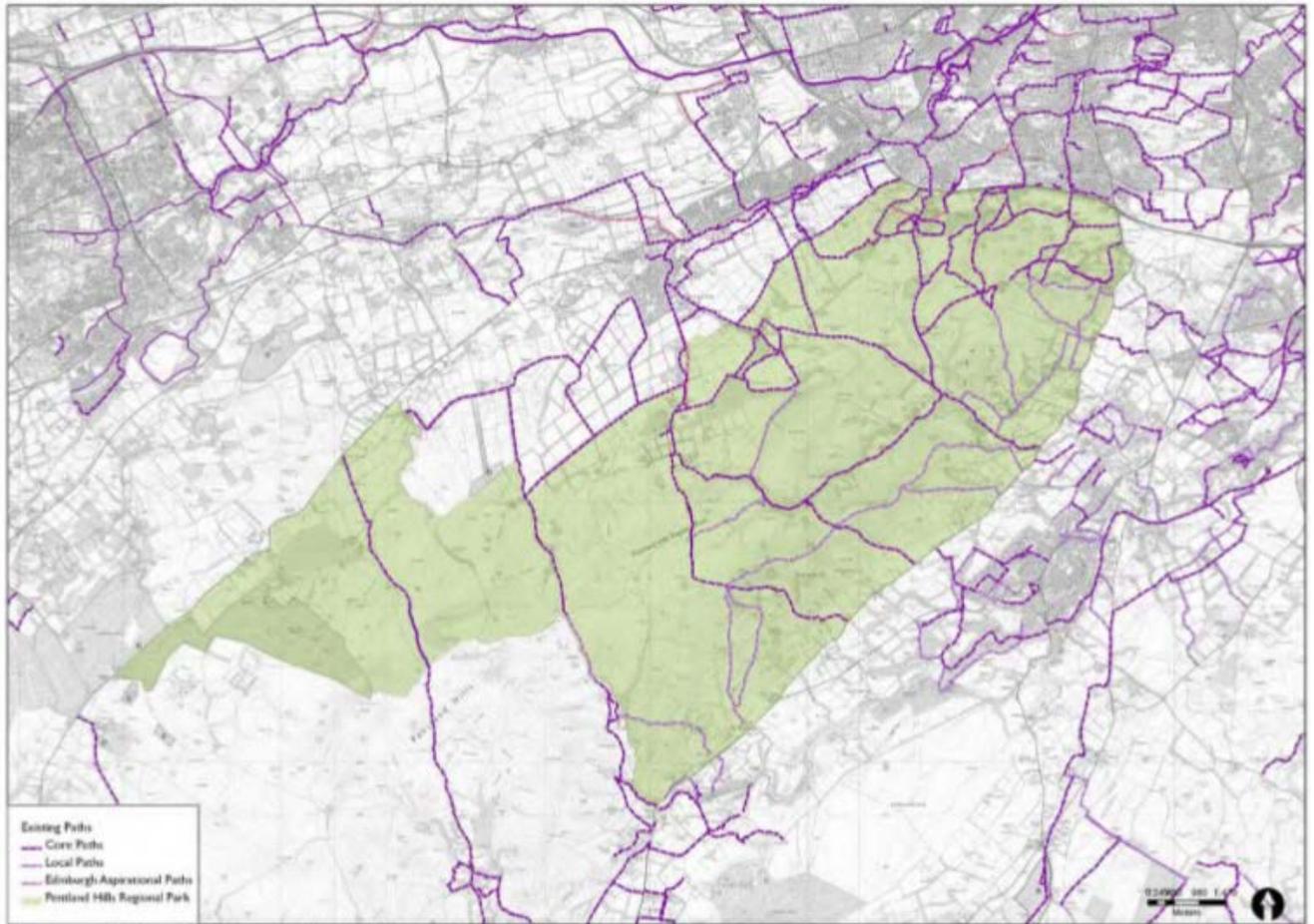


2. Shortest Route

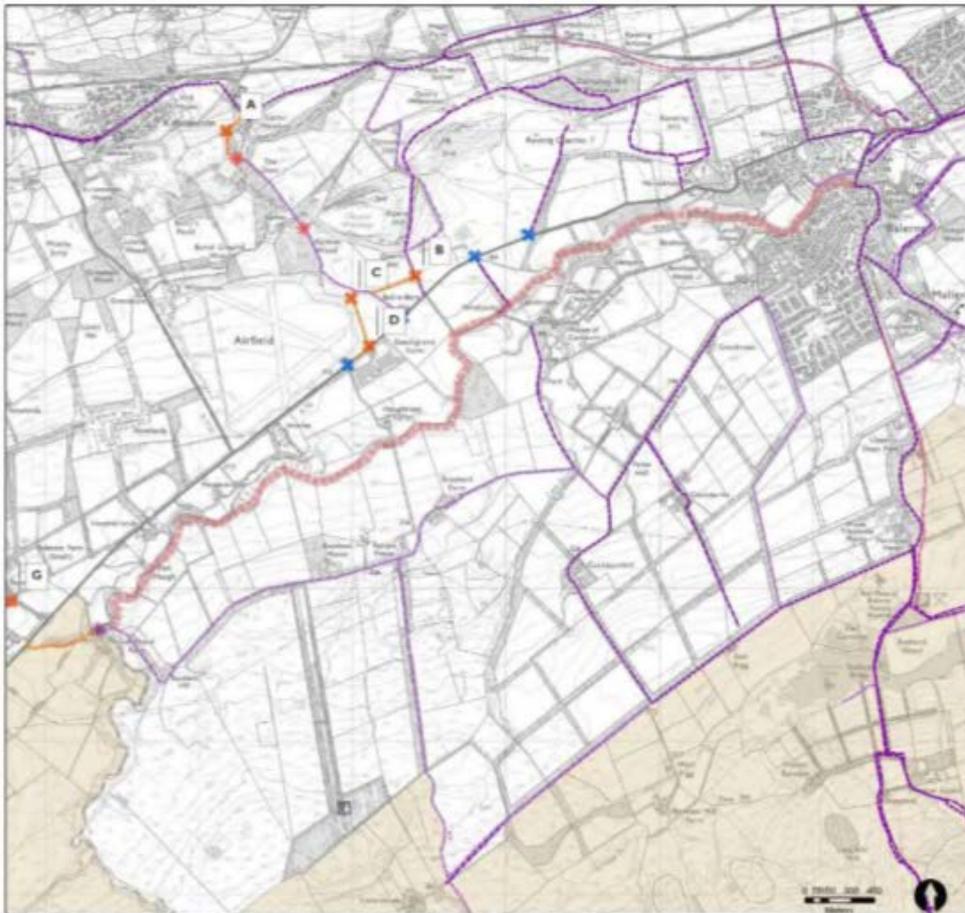


Appendix 2

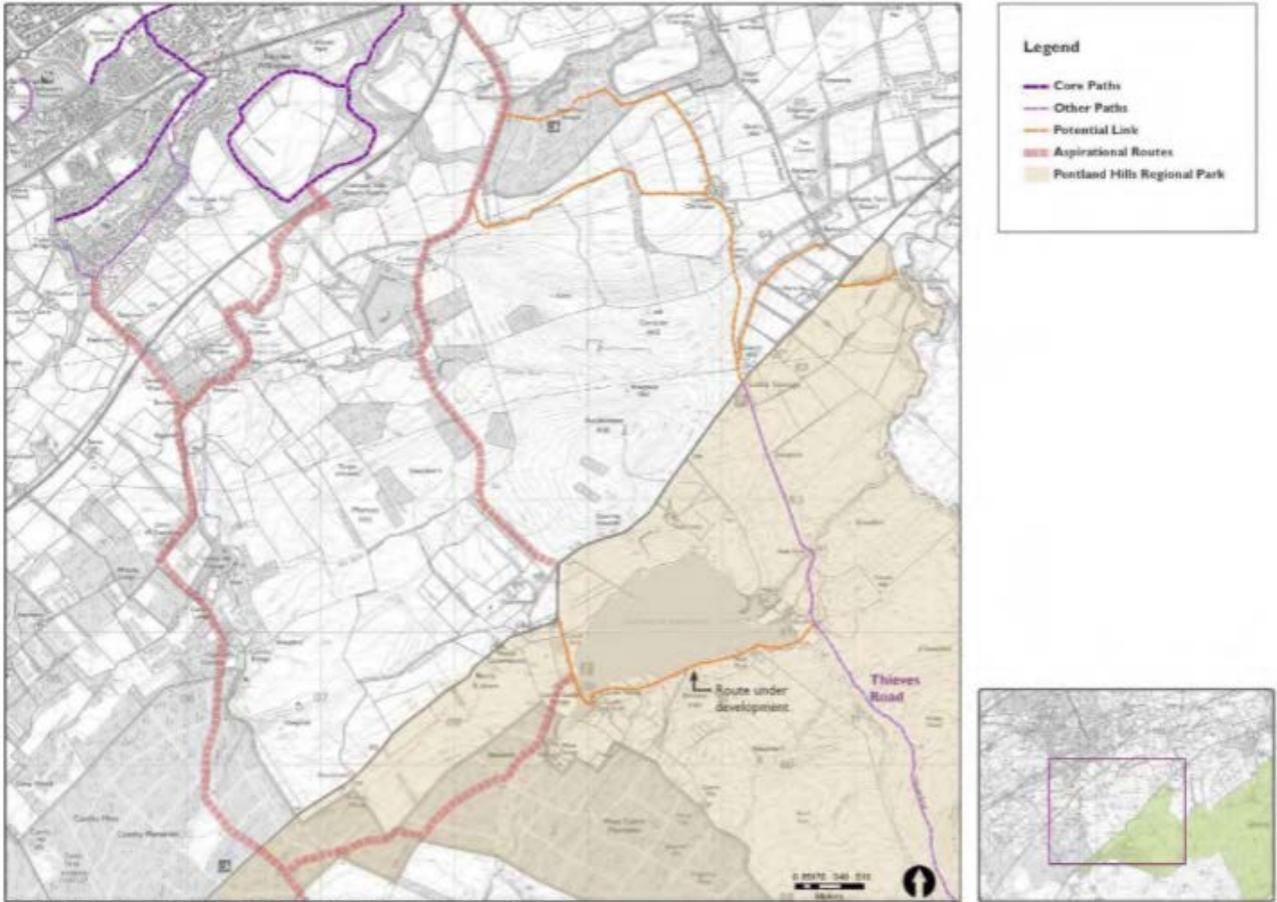
Maps extract from “Improving Access Routes Between the Pentland Hills Regional Park and Surrounding Communities” produced by Land Use Consultant, 2011



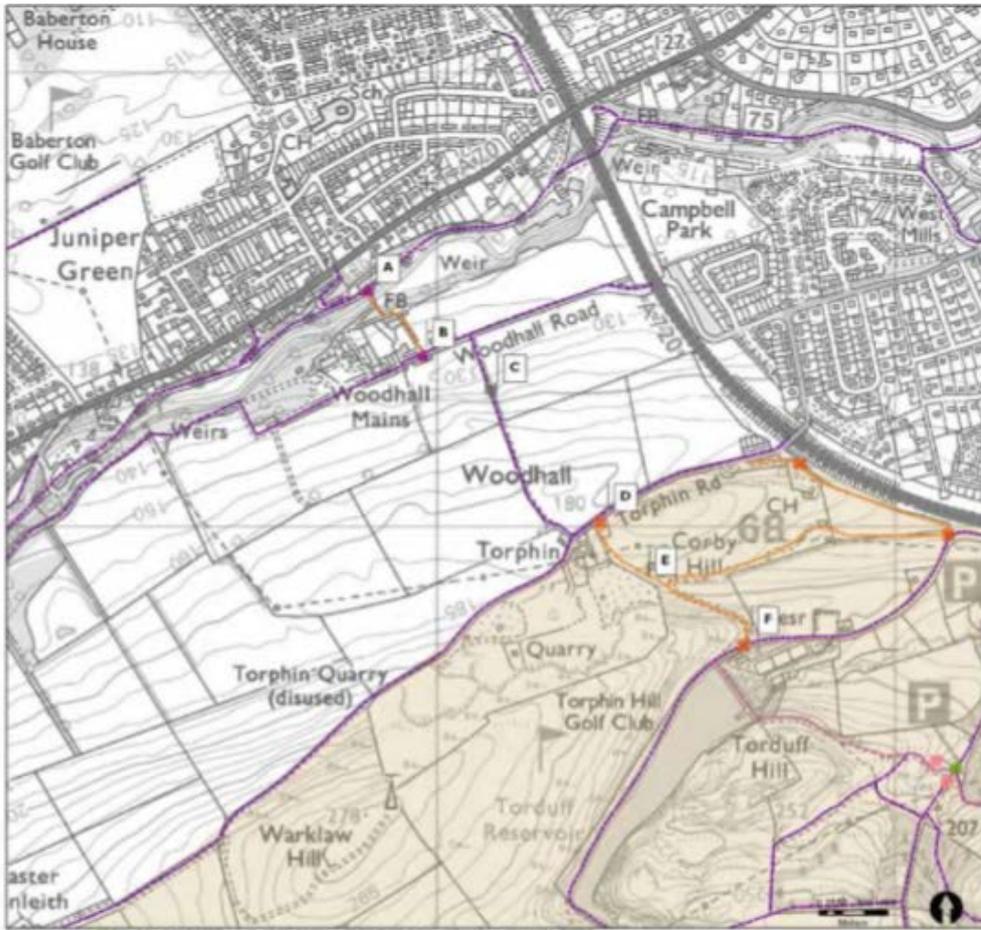
Existing path network PHRP



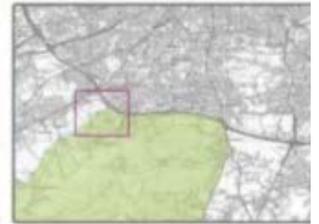
Path Selm Muir Wood – Little Vantage & Belstane - Little Vantage



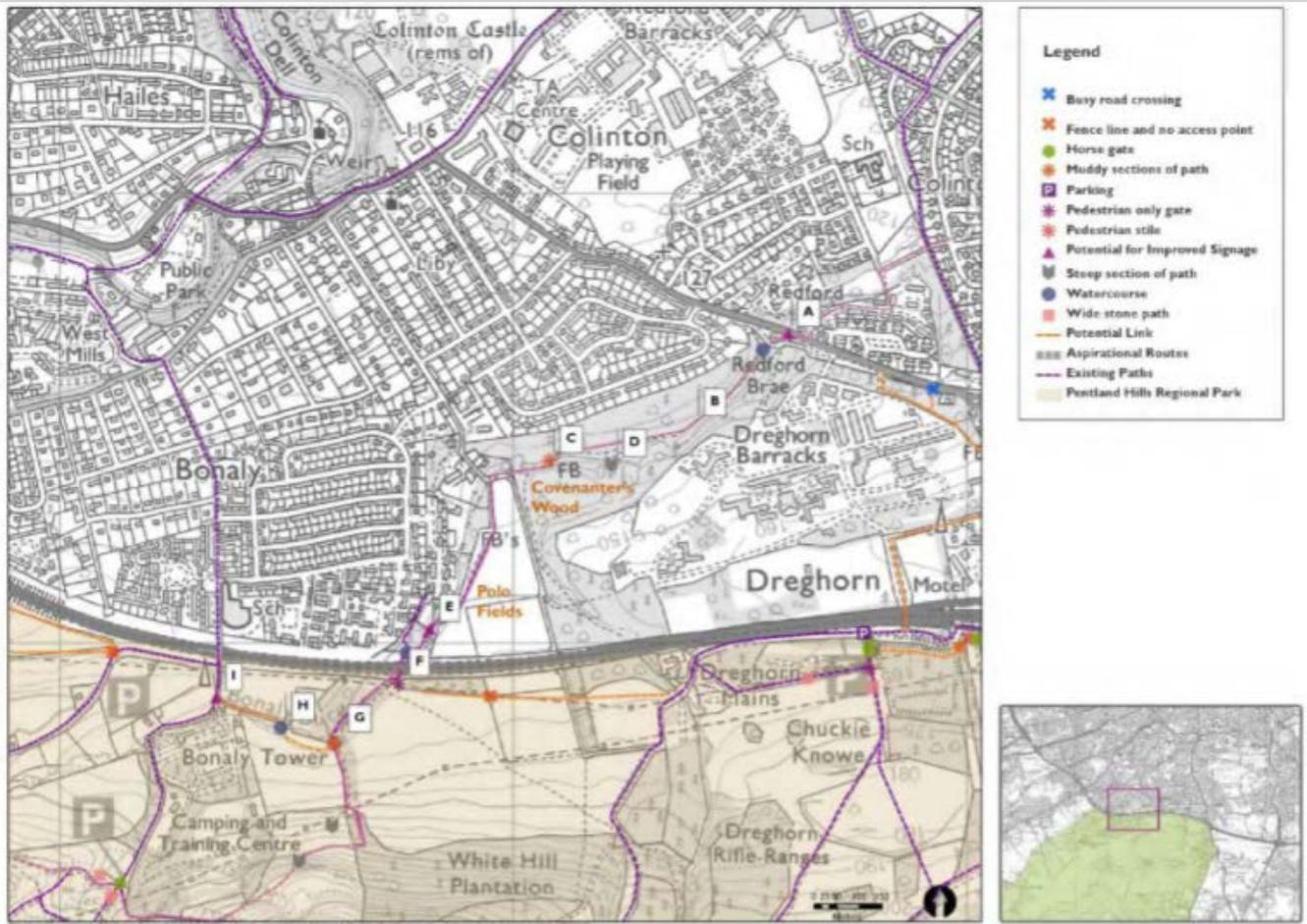
Path Linhouse and Camilty Water to the Pentlands (Thieves road)



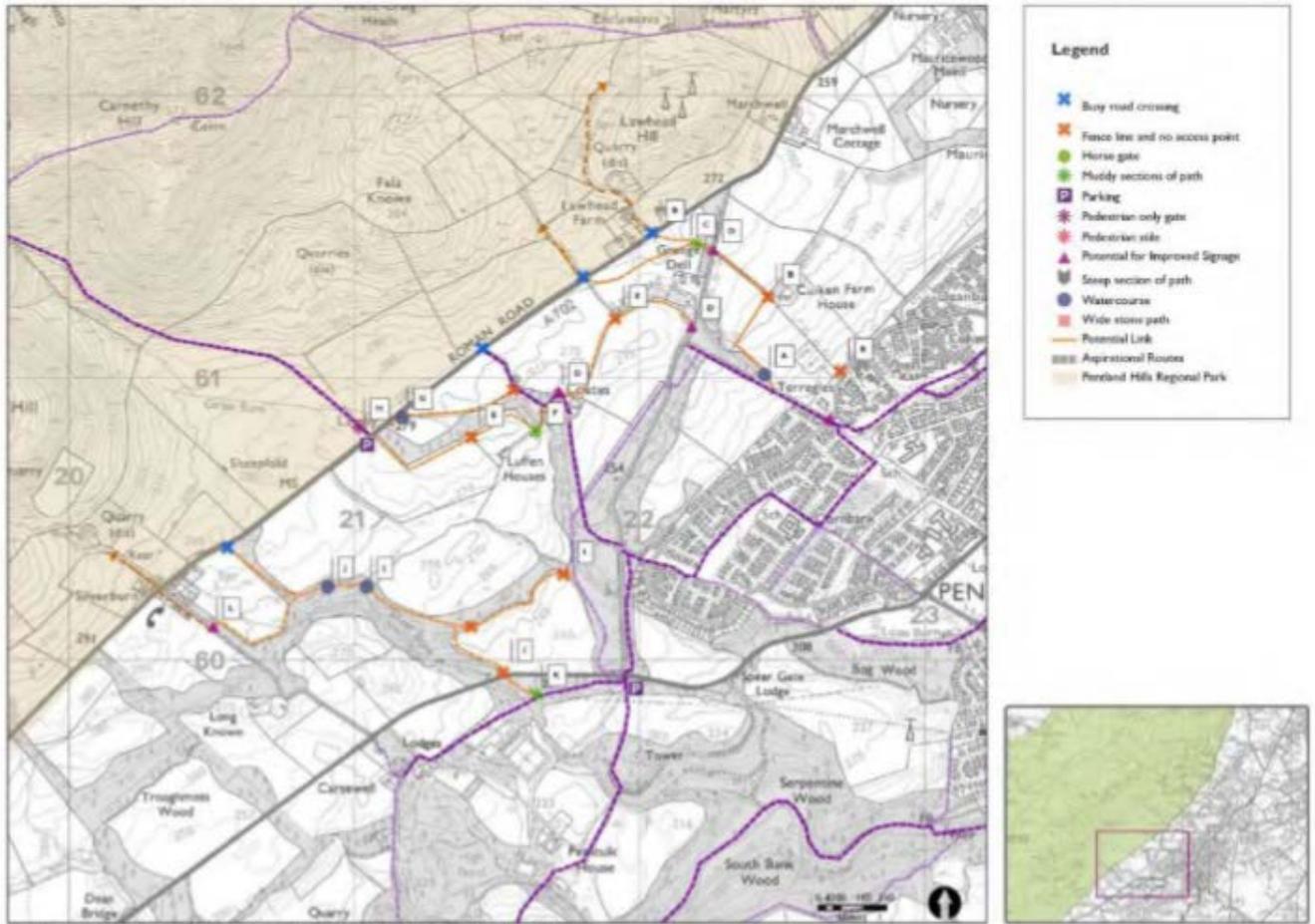
- Legend**
- Busy road crossing
 - Fence line and no access point
 - Horse gate
 - Muddy sections of path
 - Parking
 - Pedestrian only gate
 - Pedestrian stile
 - Potential for Improved Signage
 - Steep section of path
 - Watercourse
 - Wide stone path
 - Potential Link
 - Aspirational Routes
 - Existing Paths
 - Pentland Hills Regional Park



Path from Water of Leith to Bonaly Country Park



Path from Redford Road via Covenanters Wood/Bonaly Burn and Colinton Polo Fields to Bonaly Country Park

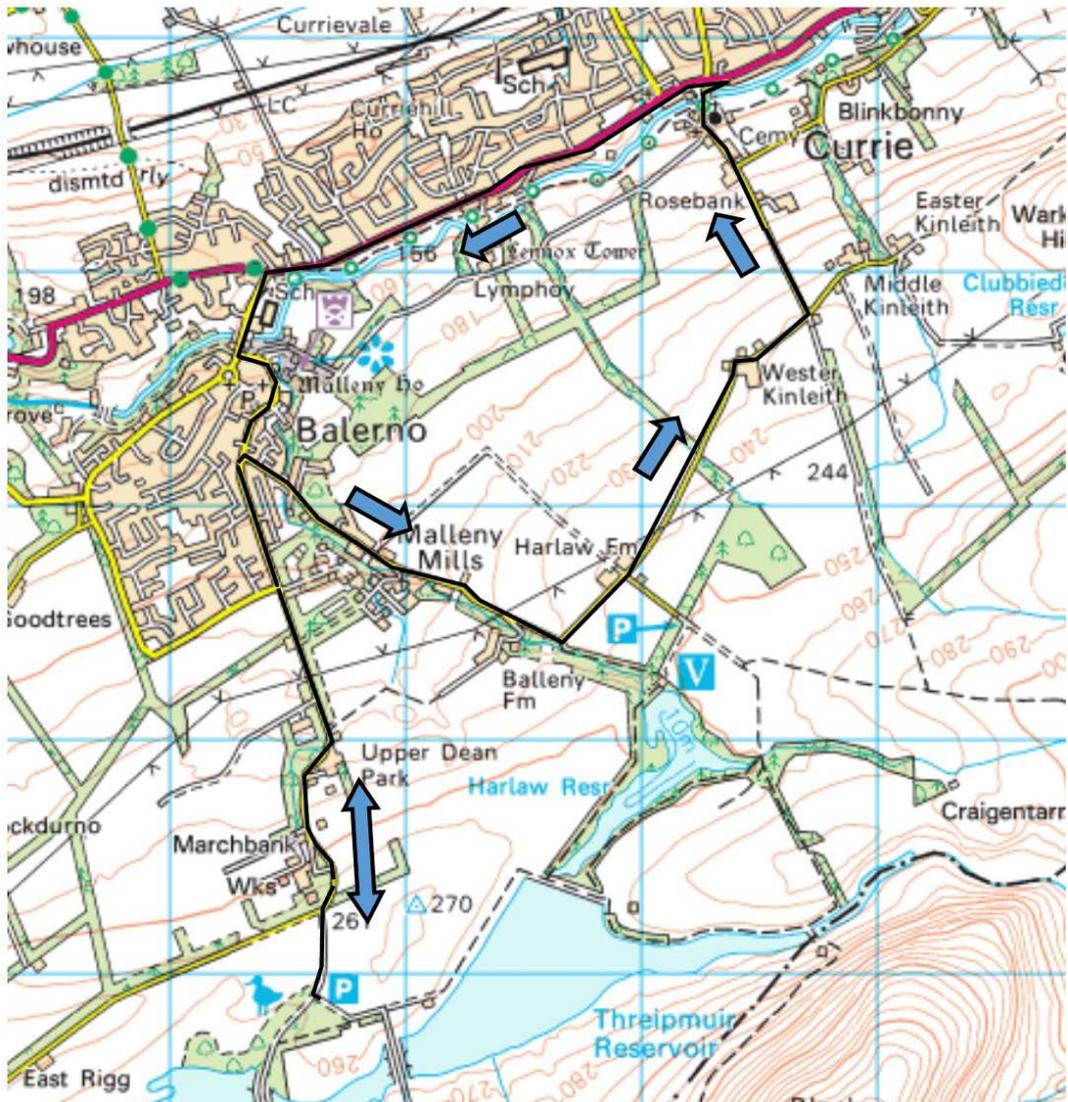


Path from Bush Estate – Fulford, and Bush Estate - Glencorse Burn - Flotterstone Bridge

Appendix 3

Providing a shuttle bus service from the local communities, map of route one and two

Route One



Route Two

