

AYRSHIRE JOINT PLANNING STEERING GROUP
16 December 2009

Central Scotland Green Network

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To advise the Steering Group of the measures being taken to deliver a Green Network for Central Scotland.

BACKGROUND

2. The Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) is one of 14 National Developments included in National Planning Framework 2 (NPF2) considered to be an essential element for Scotland's long term development. The programme was formally launched by Ministers on 30 September 2009. Covering Ayrshire, Glasgow and the Clyde Valley, Falkirk and Edinburgh CSGN is an ambitious new green space project, the largest of its kind in Europe. It sets out to transform the natural environment of the Central Belt through four key priorities: a significant increase in recreational woodland expansion; restoring vacant and derelict land; improving networks for walking and cycling to encourage more active travel and to build a strategic network of priority habitats.

PROGRESS TO DATE

3. CSGN is being lead jointly by the Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage on behalf of Scottish Ministers. An interim Steering Group of officers has been established with Ayrshire represented through the Joint Planning Unit. In the last year the work of the Steering Group has been to develop the concept, structure and measures for delivery and to identify the contribution Green Networks can make to the economy.
4. Since the Ministerial launch on the 30th September, the interim Steering Group has focused on establishing a support unit, engagement with potential stakeholders, setting up a new Partnership Board and appointment of an independent chair, developing mechanisms which raise awareness of the national development and developing the first draft work plan (to be consulted on in early 2010).

AREA COVERED BY CENTRAL SCOTLAND GREEN NETWORK

5. A final boundary has yet to be drawn up for the CSGN, however it is anticipated to cover all or large parts of Ayrshire, Glasgow and Clyde Valley, Falkirk, Clackmannanshire, Stirling Edinburgh and the Lothians, and parts of Fife. To some extent the geography

will be determined by the priorities for action identified by the 19 local authorities and other parties involved in its delivery. A working group has been set up to advise on a preferred future boundary of the CSGN area and this will be subject to consultation in January. It is worth noting however that during the Parliamentary debate on 12th November held on the CSGN the question of the boundary was raised by a number of MSP's with requests for the inclusion of all of Ayrshire.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

6. Given the extensive range of stakeholders who will have a part to play in the delivery of this National Development there has been considerable discussion around the future Board membership and whilst no firm consensus has yet been reached a small board capable of drawing experience from a range of individuals is seen as desirable. This board will have an independent part-time Chair who will be recruited through advertisement (already underway). It is hoped that the appointment of a Chair will allow the new board to be first meet early in the New Year (The Board will replace the Interim Steering Group). The Board will be supported by representatives from the FCS, SNH and Scottish Enterprise. It is expected that specific council representation from Ayrshire will be sought for the Board.

FUTURE DELIVERY

7. The CSGN is clearly at a formative stage but offers the prospect of strengthening existing regeneration programmes, securing and sustaining long term employment opportunities and providing improvements in people's quality of life through increasing access to high quality green space and recreational opportunities. The consultation, which will be undertaken in early 2010, will explore how the "step change" sought in the environment of Central Scotland can be achieved. This consultation will not only raise awareness of the CSGN but seek champions capable of delivering the CSGN vision outlined in the launch in September.
8. In Ayrshire the building blocks for linking to CSGN are already in place and illustrated through the policy within the Joint Structure Plan and Woodland Strategy, the concept is also identified as an element in the Main Issues Report of North Ayrshire Council. Through initiatives and projects undertaken by a range of organizations, including the Urban Regeneration Company, Scottish Wildlife Trust, East Ayrshire Woodlands and the Ayrshire Rivers Trust, employment has been created, habitat and recreational opportunities have been provided, biodiversity improved and measures to adapt to climate change developed. It is clear, however, that if the potential for CSGN is to be fully realized discrete local actions may not in themselves be sufficient and a more co-ordinated and integrated approach toward green network delivery will be necessary.

CONCLUSION

9. The Government has announced a major new initiative to develop a Central Scotland Green Network within the 19 councils in Central Scotland. This project is one of the 14 National Developments identified in NPF2, is being led by FCS and SNH with staff redeployed from the Central Scotland Forest Trust. Although specific funding for projects is not yet in place much of the Parliamentary debate focused on this issue and it is clear that many councils are already positioning themselves to respond to a future perceived priority. In the early part of 2010 Ayrshire councils will need to respond to a series of consultations on whether they wish to be engaged with CSGN in principle, and, if so, what appropriate management structures will need to be put in place, what areas should be included, priority tasks and who should be represented on the Board.

RECOMMENDATION

10. The Steering Group is asked to remit this report to an early meeting of the Technical Management Team for discussion and to report back at the next meeting.

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