

Calderwood Path Work Project Public Engagement Document 2024

Parks & Woodland, West Lothian Council



1.0 Public Engagement Overview

As part of the management of Calderwood, several paths from the existing path network have been identified for upgrade to a Type-1 stone surface. We are aware that visitors may appreciate Calderwood and the path network in its current form, and will be carrying out public engagement as part of this project.

This document was produced to provide details of the proposed Calderwood Path Work Project, and is one of two parts of the public engagement. The second part is a digital questionnaire, which will be open online from Thursday 20th June until Thursday 11th July, when the public engagement period ends.

A public drop-in session will be held on Wednesday 3rd July 2024, from 5.30pm-7.30pm in Almondell Visitor Centre. Visitors can drop-in within this time to view information boards on the Path Work Project and discuss these with a Ranger, and comment on the project by filling out physical survey forms.

2.0 Path Work Project Overview

- The upgrade of approximately 5.3km of path network in Calderwood, to Type 1 stone surface paths.
- Path widths will vary from a maximum width of 1.2 metres (m), 1.4m, 1.6m and 1.8m in different sections, based on what is appropriate for that particular area of the site and taking into account existing features such as trees.
- Any surface vegetation removed as a result of the work will remain on site, and be reused to revegetate other areas.
- There are no plans for major woodland works as part of this project. There will be a requirement for some selective pruning and crown lifting, but only where applicable in the areas where the paths are.
- Drainage work will be carried out in certain sections where existing drainage issues are apparent, using culverts, leats and drainage ditches. Where possible, historic/existing drainage ditches will be re-established.
- Before any work commences, the project will require approval from NatureScot, and will then be run in line with any measures applied.

3.0 Why is the work being carried out?

3.1 Habitat Loss

The path work is primarily being carried out to address habitat loss, which is being caused as a result of path erosion and drainage issues. Increases in extreme weather and flooding events have contributed to the scouring of path surfaces, causing several sections of the path network to erode and become thick with mud. To avoid these muddy areas, additional paths have been created by people at the sides of the existing paths, and in other areas of vegetation. This has resulted in the braiding and widening of many sections of path, causing important ground flora to be trampled and subsequently lost from the ground. Addressing the drainage issues and surfacing the main sections of path will allow the ground flora to recover and revegetate at the sides of the path, reducing the widened sections of path back down to a smaller path width.



Figure 1 - Drainage issues leading to path braiding and widening



Figure 2 - Path widening leading to bluebells being crushed and removed from the ground

3.2 Climate Change adaptability

West Lothian Council declared a Climate Emergency in September 2019, and produced the Climate Change Strategy 2021-2028. It is recognised within the strategy that change and adaptation is required to help to reduce the impacts of Climate Change. Wetter summers, milder winters and the increase in flash flooding events are negatively affecting the paths within Calderwood and will continue to cause drainage issues and scouring.

Previously, NatureScot have not given permission for surfaced paths within Calderwood SSSI, but recognise that the work is now required to help to protect the important ground flora.

3.3 Accessibility

This work will also help to increase the accessibility of the site to visitors who are currently unable to use the path network due to the issues mentioned above. Part of the project will involve communicating what 'responsible access' looks like in Calderwood, and funding will be sought to install information panels explaining the importance of responsible access.

4.0 SSSI Designation

4.1 Calderwood's Designation

Calderwood is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This is a statutory conservation designation made by NatureScot (previously named Scottish Natural Heritage), designed to protect areas of land or water that are considered particularly valuable for their wildlife, geology or landform features. Calderwood was first notified as a SSSI in 1988 under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*, and then reviewed under the *Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004*. The notified natural features are:

- **Woodland: Upland oak woodland**
- **Wetland: Valley fen**

Within these features, the woodland and ground flora are recognised as characteristic of 'long established woods'. The size of the designated area is 60.04 ha.

4.2 SSSI's and Path Work

It is an offence for anyone to intentionally or recklessly damage the protected natural features of an SSSI. As Calderwood is a designated SSSI, NatureScot ultimately decide what is appropriate management of the site. West Lothian Council must apply to NatureScot to carry out the path work, as it is deemed as an 'operation requiring consent'. Typical measures applied by NatureScot for SSSI's are:

- No dumping or spreading of soil
- No re-fuelling on site
- Only agreed vehicles (typically low-ground pressure) permitted on site
- Vehicles should follow existing track lines wherever possible
- No materials to be stored on vegetated areas
- Any turf lifted will be used to restore and re-vegetate bare areas

6.0 Path Work Project

6.1 Type 1 Paths

Type 1 paths consist of a type 1 stone base (crushed stone) and a whin dust top (fine powdery material), which consolidate down to form an unbound path surface. This means the surface is not sealed like tarmac paths for example.

The picture on the right (Figure 3) shows an example of a type 1 stone path at another site managed by Parks & Woodland, after it has consolidated down and vegetation has grown up at the sides. To start with, the path work may look harsh, but will then begin to blend in with the surroundings.



Figure 3 - Example of a type 1 stone path

6.2 Path Widths

The paths shown on the map (page 5) have been highlighted for upgrade to a Type 1 stone surface. The stone path widths vary from 1.2 metres, 1.4 metres, 1.6 metres and 1.8 metres maximum, and have been chosen for each section of Calderwood (and Oakbank) based on the width of the current unsurfaced paths, and considering ground vegetation and trees. For this reason, the widths may end up being less than specified to fit between trees and to avoid removal of vegetation.

For example, the path shown below on the left (Figure 4) is currently 1.2m wide, and so would be surfaced to a 1.2m width. The path shown on the right (Figure 5) is a section of the same path, but currently measures 1m wide due to surrounding trees and ground vegetation. The stone path width would be reduced in this area to fit in with what is currently there.



Figure 4 - 1.2m width shown on measuring tape



Figure 5 - 1m width shown on measuring tape along same path

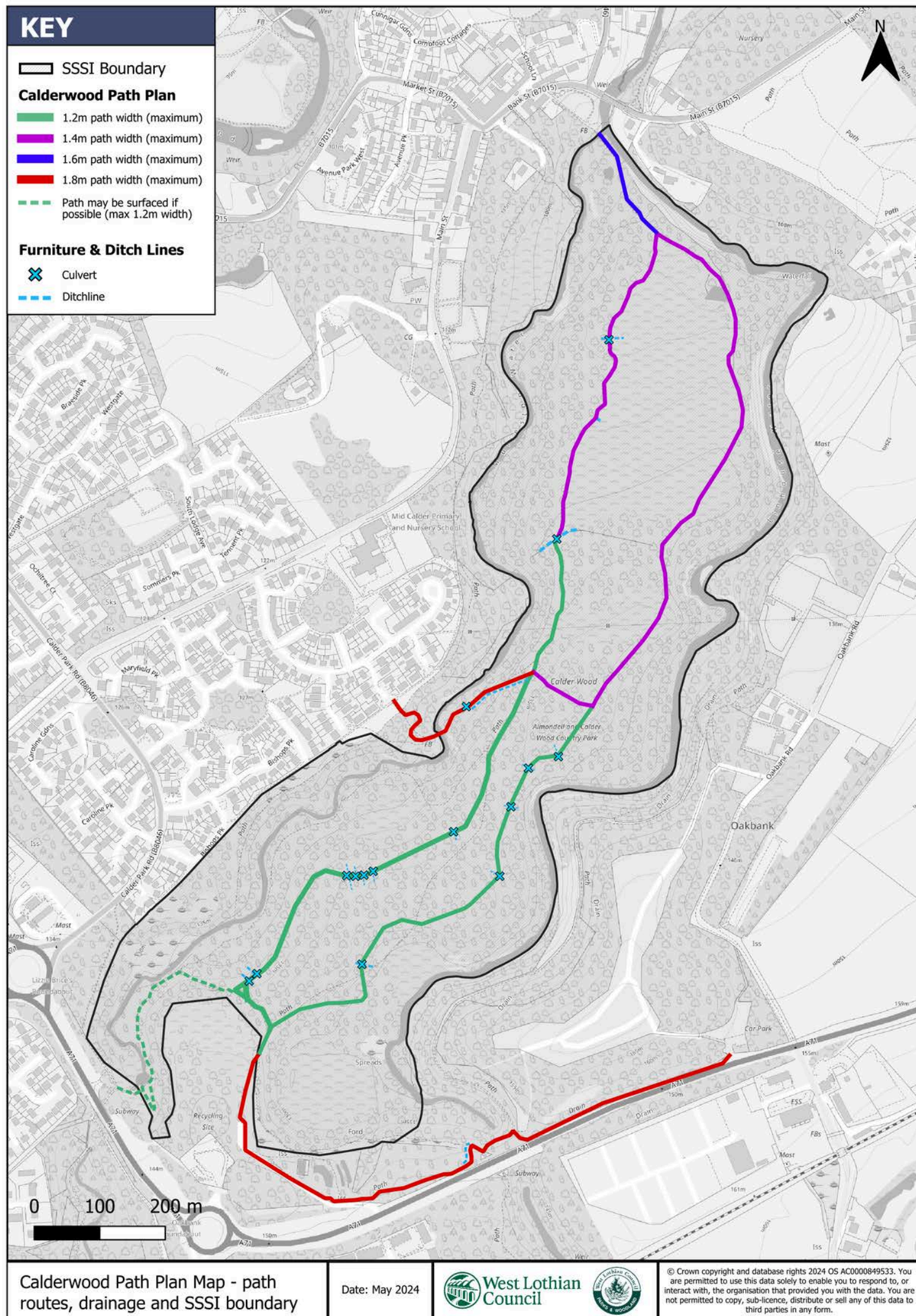


Figure 6 - Map of Path Work

In some areas, the stone path width will be less than the existing surface. As visitors begin to use the stone paths, the side vegetation will be able to grow in more which will eventually reduce the overall width of the path. Figures 7 & 8 below show what a 1.4m path width would look like in these areas.



Figure 7 - Example of path width in Calderwood



Figure 8 - Example of path width in Calderwood

In other areas, the path widths are currently wide enough for two people to walk side by side. Continuous use in this way has widened the path and stripped off some ground vegetation. In these areas, the path would be surfaced to their current width to take into account how the paths are currently being used. Figure 9 below shows a 1.4m path width.



Figure 9 - Example of 1.4m path width on current width of path

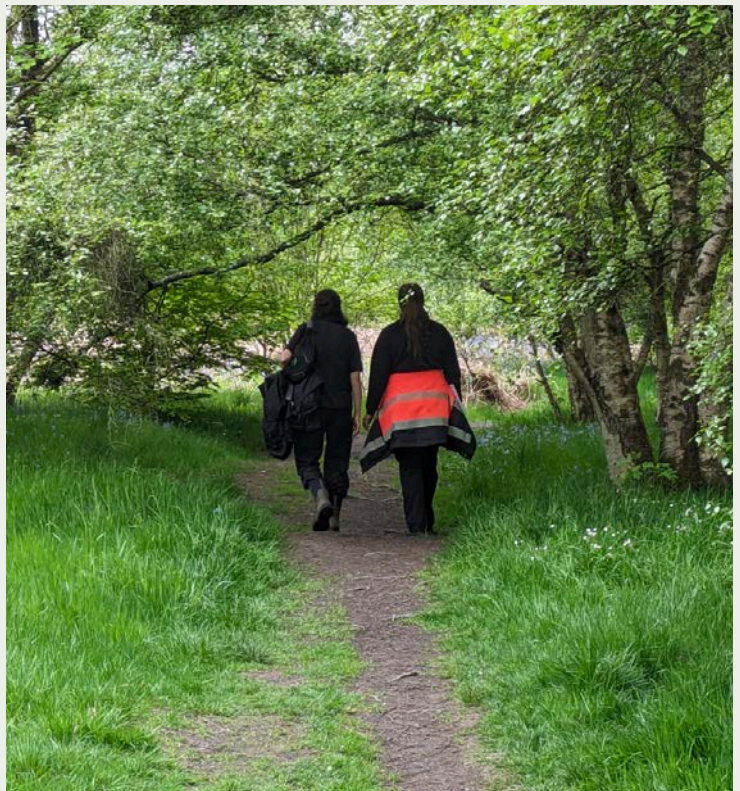


Figure 10 - Example of two people walking side by side

Where possible, fallen trees and deadwood will be left in their natural state and the surfaced path would meander around these features instead, as shown below.



Figure 11 - Example of path meandering around fallen tree



Figure 12 - Example of path meandering to avoid overhanging tree

6.3 Path Drainage

Culverts, lets and drainage ditches will be used in areas suffering from drainage issues, such as those shown below in Figures 13 & 14.



Figure 13 - Example of drainage issues



Figure 14 - Example of drainage issues

Though there are some areas that are worse than others (like above), the chosen paths would be surfaced in their entirety rather than just in smaller individual sections. Further issues can occur where a stone path joins an unsurfaced path, as the end section of the stone sinks into the soft mud, resulting in more muddy patches and uneven ground. These issues could then encourage more informal paths to be created at the sides to avoid muddy sections, which would negatively impact ground vegetation. We also would not have the funding to go back in to fix issues in the future.

7.0 Responsible Access in Calderwood

Calderwood SSSI is a sensitive site and due to its designation, is managed in a different way to other Parks & Woodland Country Parks and woodland sites. Responsible access also looks different for Calderwood, as some recreational activities that may be appropriate for other sites, can cause damage to the important ground flora and woodland. One of the ‘negative pressures’ identified by Naturescot for Calderwood SSSI is recreation and disturbance.

We are asking visitors to stick to the surfaced paths in Calderwood, and avoid damaging ground vegetation. Dogs should have close recall or be kept on a lead, and should not be allowed to chase wildlife or destroy ground vegetation. Dog waste must always be picked up and disposed of responsibly. The site is not suitable for mountain biking, but as the paths are multi-user, visitors will be able to cycle on the paths, keeping speeds down and giving way to other site users.

Funding will be sought for signage for Calderwood, which will ask visitors to stick to the paths and give an overview of responsible access for the site. Figure 15 below shows how responsible behaviour in Nature Reserves and other Conservation areas is outlined in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Scottish Outdoor Access Code, 2005	
RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR BY THE PUBLIC	RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR BY LAND MANAGERS
> NATURE RESERVES AND OTHER CONSERVATION AREAS	
Access rights extend to these places but remember that they are carefully managed for nature conservation and to safeguard rare animals and plants. Take care to avoid damaging the site or disturbing its wildlife, or interfering with its management or enjoyment by others. Depending on your activity, you might be requested to follow a specific route or to avoid exercising access rights in a specific area: following such local guidance can help to safeguard the natural heritage of these areas.	Providing information on the importance of the site and on the best routes for people to follow, and providing good paths, can help to minimise damage and disturbance, and increase public awareness of wildlife.

Figure 15 - Responsible Behaviour in Nature Reserves and other Conservations areas snippet from Scottish Outdoor Access Code

8.0 Public Engagement Survey

Part two of the public engagement for the path work project is an online questionnaire. Please visit the link provided on the West Lothian Council Almondell & Calderwood Country Park page (<https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/31520/Almondell-Calderwood-Country-Park>) to fill this out. Thank you for your time.