

Calderwood Path Work Project Public Engagement Results

Parks & Woodland, West Lothian Council

August 2024



1. Overview

West Lothian Council Parks & Woodland published an online public engagement document, accompanied by an online survey to gather responses to the Path Work Project for Calderwood, which is part of Almondell and Calderwood Country Park. The document and survey were available online from Thursday 20th June – Thursday 11th July. Information boards and physical survey forms were also available in Almondell Visitor Centre during this time. The online and physical survey received a combined total of 61 responses, which are outlined below.

2. Survey Results

2.1. In response to Question 1 “*Do you agree with the surfacing of the path network in Calderwood?*”, the results were: 30 people agreed with the Project proposal outlined in the Public Engagement document, 25 people disagreed, and 6 people agreed with the Project proposal but not to the full extent outlined in the document. Figure 1 below shows these results in a donut chart.

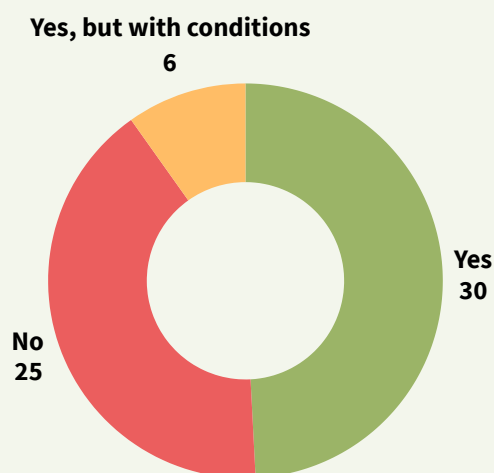


Figure 1. Results of Question 1 in a donut chart

2.2. In response to Question 2 “*Do you feel the 1.2 metre path width is appropriate for the area marked on the map?*” the results were: 39 people agreed, and 22 people disagreed.

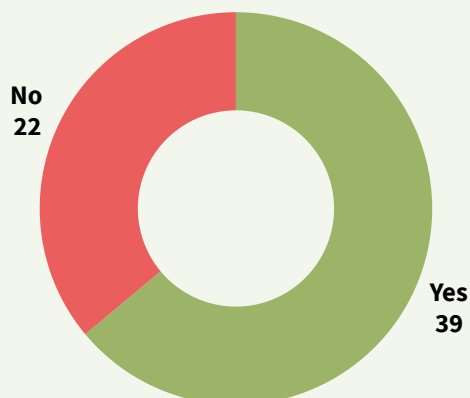


Figure 2. Results of Question 2 in a donut chart

2.3. In response to Question 3 “*Do you feel the 1.4 metre path width is appropriate for the area marked on the map?*” the results were: 37 people agreed, and 24 people disagreed.

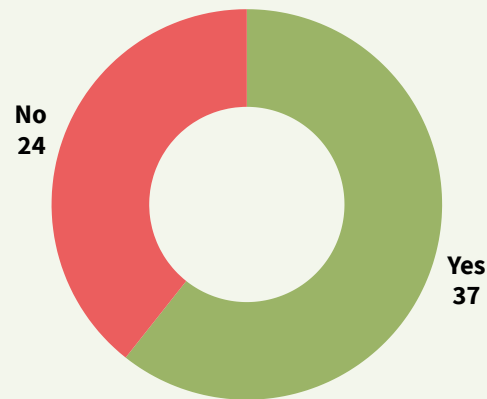


Figure 3. Results of Question 3 in a donut chart

2.4. In response to Question 4 “*Do you feel the 1.6 metre path width is appropriate for the area marked on the map?*” the results were: 34 people agreed, and 27 people disagreed.



Figure 4. Results of Question 4 in a donut chart

2.5. In response to Question 5 “*Do you feel the 1.8 metre path width is appropriate for the Oakbank area marked on the map?*” the results were: 33 people agreed, and 28 people disagreed.

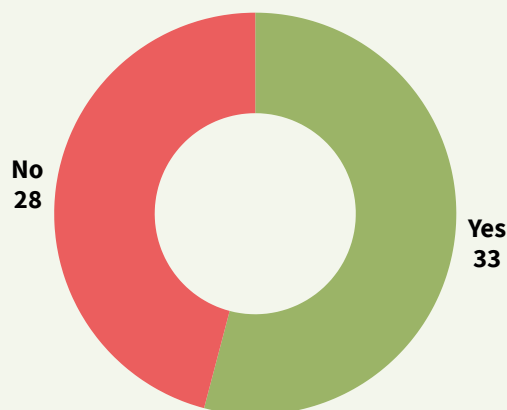


Figure 5. Results of Question 5 in a donut chart

2.6. Survey Comments

In addition to the fixed choice questions shown above, several comments were also submitted in online surveys, physical surveys and on individual post-it notes on the information boards in Almondell Visitor Centre. Comments received that were in agreement with the Project included:

- Agreeing that the proposal will increase accessibility to an area of the Country Park for visitors who are currently unable to access it
- Help to reduce the impacts of erosion
- Reduce the level of sediment pollution into sensitive habitats
- Protect sensitive ground flora from trampling
- Improve sections of the path network that have become impassable in poor weather

Comments received that were in disagreement with the Project included:

- Losing the natural feel of the woodland
- Increased access to more people with associated impacts such as litter and noise
- Increased use of motorbikes
- Damage to the surrounding woodland
- This will restrict access elsewhere in Calderwood

3. Drop-in Session

The Ranger Service also held an in person drop-in session at Almondell Visitor Centre on Wednesday 3rd July from 5.30pm-7pm, to provide an opportunity for visitors to speak to the Ranger Service about the Project. The session was attended by 4 visitors in total.

4. Parks & Woodland Response to Results

West Lothian Council (WLC) declared a Climate Emergency in September 2019 and in line with this declaration, published the Climate Change Strategy 2021-2028. The strategy makes clear that as well as reducing our emissions (mitigation), we will need to consider how we will adjust to the impacts of climate change that are unfolding (adaptation). This includes adapting to the impacts of rising temperatures and intense rainfall and flooding events, as sites and infrastructure will continue to be affected.

4.1. Survey Comment(s): *The paths should be left unsurfaced*

Response: The main issue that the path work will address is the habitat loss being caused by path erosion and drainage issues. This has led to the widening or braiding of paths as visitors try to avoid these issues. We do recognise that some visitors are content with Calderwood as it is, but also understand that important ground flora is being stripped from site due to the issues mentioned above. The Path Work Project aims to mitigate current issues and adapt to future disruptive weather events, allowing the ground flora to recover. NatureScot have agreed that the project is necessary to protect ground vegetation, and will provide specific measures including the size of machinery, routes on which they can go, and the handling of vegetation. We will not carry out any work that has not been agreed with NatureScot.

4.2. Survey Comment(s): *Nature will mend the damage*

Response: The erosion and drainage issues have worsened over time and will likely continue to do so, with increases in flooding events and unpredictable weather resulting in wetter summers and milder winters. There is no guarantee that the weather will stay consistently dry enough during summer months to allow the conditions on the main paths to improve. The majority of visitors will use a surfaced path, which will help nature to recover as the flora will not be trampled as much.

4.3. Survey Comment(s): *Upgrading the paths will increase motorbikes on site*

Use of motor vehicles on any path is illegal and is a Police matter. We encourage visitors to report the illegal use of motor vehicles to the Police, and will provide signage on site if necessary. We know that motorbikes have been reported in Calderwood before, and have reduced the width of the path at Oakbank as it enters Calderwood in response to this.

4.4. Survey Comment(s): *There are other places for people to visit if they are unable to access Calderwood.*

Response: The path work will help to improve access for visitors who are currently unable to visit due to the ground conditions. Although this is not the main reason for the Project taking place, it will provide people who have previously been unable to access Calderwood with the opportunity to do so. Many people have specified in the survey how special Calderwood is, but there are many other people who have also commented that they have difficulty accessing the site and therefore cannot experience this in the same way. We understand that those who currently access the site are able to do so in its current state, but it would not be reasonable to leave the paths unsurfaced with the intention to restrict access to other visitors.

4.5. Survey Comment(s): *The project will restrict access for other recreational uses*

Response: Responsible access does not look the same across every site. Calderwood's SSSI designation is partly for important ground flora, and this is the reason that NatureScot will allow a path work project within the SSSI boundary. As specified in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code in relation to Nature Reserves and other Conservation Areas "*depending on your activity, you may be requested to follow a specific route or to avoid exercising access rights in a specific area*". We are asking visitors to be considerate of the reasons why Calderwood is a designated SSSI, and to stick to the paths where possible. Activities that would damage the site would not be viewed as responsible access.

In turn, responsible behaviour by the land manager would be providing information on the importance of the site and providing good quality paths, which would help to minimise damage and disturbance. Funding will be sought to install signage advising visitors of the site's importance and how to help to protect it.

5. Changes to the Path Work Project

Based on the feedback provided by the public through the online questionnaire and the in person drop in session held at Almondell Visitor Centre, a majority of people agreed either with the full proposal outlined within the engagement document, or agreed with the proposal with some alterations. However, a significant minority of respondents did not agree with the proposal, and highlighted some concerns regarding the project. As a result, some revisions to the original proposal have been made, which are as follows:

- The path through the open area of the plateau will no longer be surfaced
- Most of the path sections due to be surfaced within the SSSI boundary will now only be surfaced to a 1.2m width
- The entrance path from Gasworks Brae to the boundary of Calderwood SSSI has been added for upgrade to a 1.8m path
- A new path link will be upgraded behind the Oakbank Recycling Centre to help provide links on to Bankton Mains, Linhouse Loop and the Murieston Trail
- The path link between Oakbank and the Lizzie Bryce strip will be upgraded, providing a route from Oakbank to Mid Calder, bypassing Calderwood
- Additional paths in Oakbank will be upgraded, including the Core Path

The maps on the next two pages show the original Project plan and the new revised map post-public engagement.

6. Timeline for Works

Work will begin on site as soon as the final permissions and SSSI-related measures have been provided by NatureScot, and will start with a crown lift of trees along the routes designated for path upgrades. This will be done to a 1.5m width and 2.5m height above the path.

The work at Gasworks Brae will begin in August to comply with mitigation measures for protected species on site. It is hoped that the works elsewhere on site will be completed by October 2024. Where possible, access will be kept open for visitors and diversions will be put in place where required. Please follow all safety signage on site.

5.1. Original Map

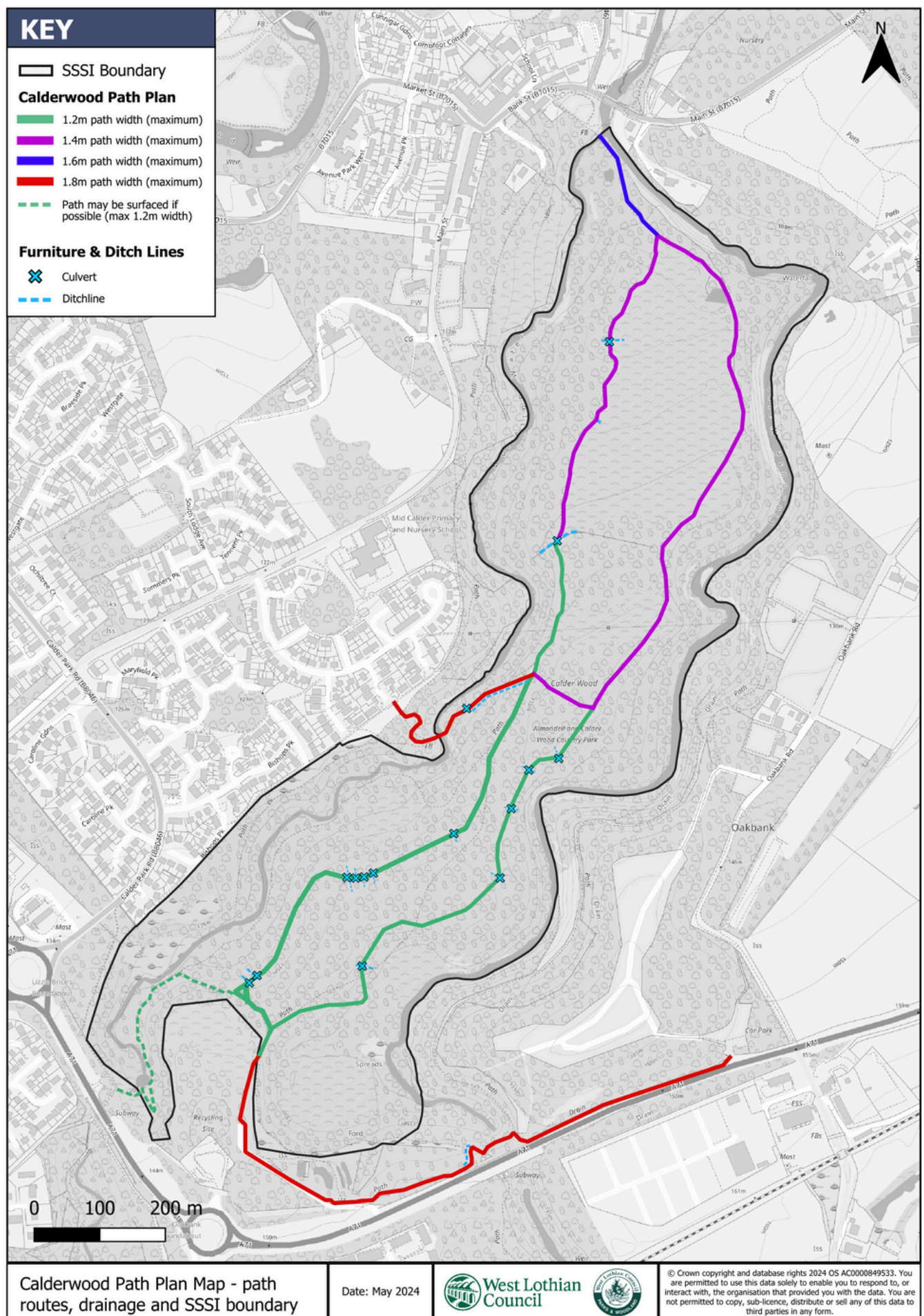


Figure 6. Original map for Path Work Project

5.2. Revised map post-engagement

