

Den o' Alyth Management Plan 2023 – 2028



(DRAFT May 2023)



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1.0 Introduction – the Plan and Partnership

The Den o' Alyth Management Plan (the Plan) is aimed for use by Perth and Kinross Council (PKC), stakeholders, volunteers and members of the public alike. Perth & Kinross Council (PKC) have ownership of the core area of the Woodland known as the Den o' Alyth, located adjacent to the town of Alyth, Perth & Kinross. PKC's Community Greenspace team manage the site on behalf of the Council.

The Plan covers landscape character and site condition, visitors and use, conservation and ecology.

Community partnership working is at the core of the Perth & Kinross Offer and is essential for ensuring countryside sites meet the needs, and are fit for the purposes of, those who enjoy them. By working together within the context of site designations, enhancing special habitats and their biodiversity builds in resilience for future generations. As such, we are joint custodians of special natural places.

The Plan is based on data gathered from 2018 onwards, historical data, previous management plans, and research both new and old; it is to be regarded as a working document that may be amended as appropriate. It is aimed to review and update the Plan every 5 years.

A full survey of the site was carried out in terms of its infrastructure to ascertain its current condition and whether it is fit for purpose. Paths, benches, picnic benches, steps, sculptures, features, bins, drainage structures, and signage have all been mapped; and proposals to either retain/remove, refurbish/replace are described in the actions list within this Plan, and illustrated on the Masterplan.

It is intended to be a concise user-friendly document and should be read with reference to the appendices for more detail as required.

Site Description

The Den o' Alyth is a woodland and burn landscape located West of the attractive town of Alyth, and highly valued by both the public and Perth & Kinross Council alike. It is nationally and internationally recognised as an important area for nature and has two landscape designations: a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Its contribution to the health and



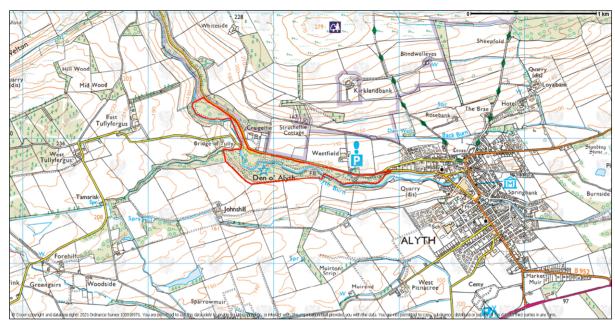


wellbeing of the local population, and the recreational opportunities which it provides are manifold.

The majority of the site is separated from the Upper Den by an access road and contains three visitor car parks, a play park, an extensive path network well-connected to the paths in the wider context, information/interpretation boards, and picnic facilities.







Location Plan

Landownership and Interested Parties

The Den o' Alyth is registered as a Common Good asset, and as such is owned and maintained by PKC (for more details please see here: Common good property: statutory guidance for local authorities - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)). The site is 21.9 hectares in size; and its management includes responsibility for the car parks, paths, signage, steps, drainage, picnic tables, bins, benches, play park (the play park sits within a separate play park-specific maintenance programme), and other features.

In addition to PKC, and local residents and users, there are a number of other parties interested as key stakeholders in the management of the Den o' Alyth including:

- Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust (PKCT) the Den is accessible from the Cateran Trail (a fully-waymarked 64 mile circular route managed and maintained by PKCT) and features on PKCT's website as a recommended detour on route.
- NatureScot (NS)
- The Alyth RiverKeepers a group of volunteers from the town of Alyth, formed in 2020 to monitor the impact of extreme weather events in the Den and contribute data to Alyth's plans for mitigating and adapting to the climate and biodiversity crises.
- Alyth Community Council and Councillors.

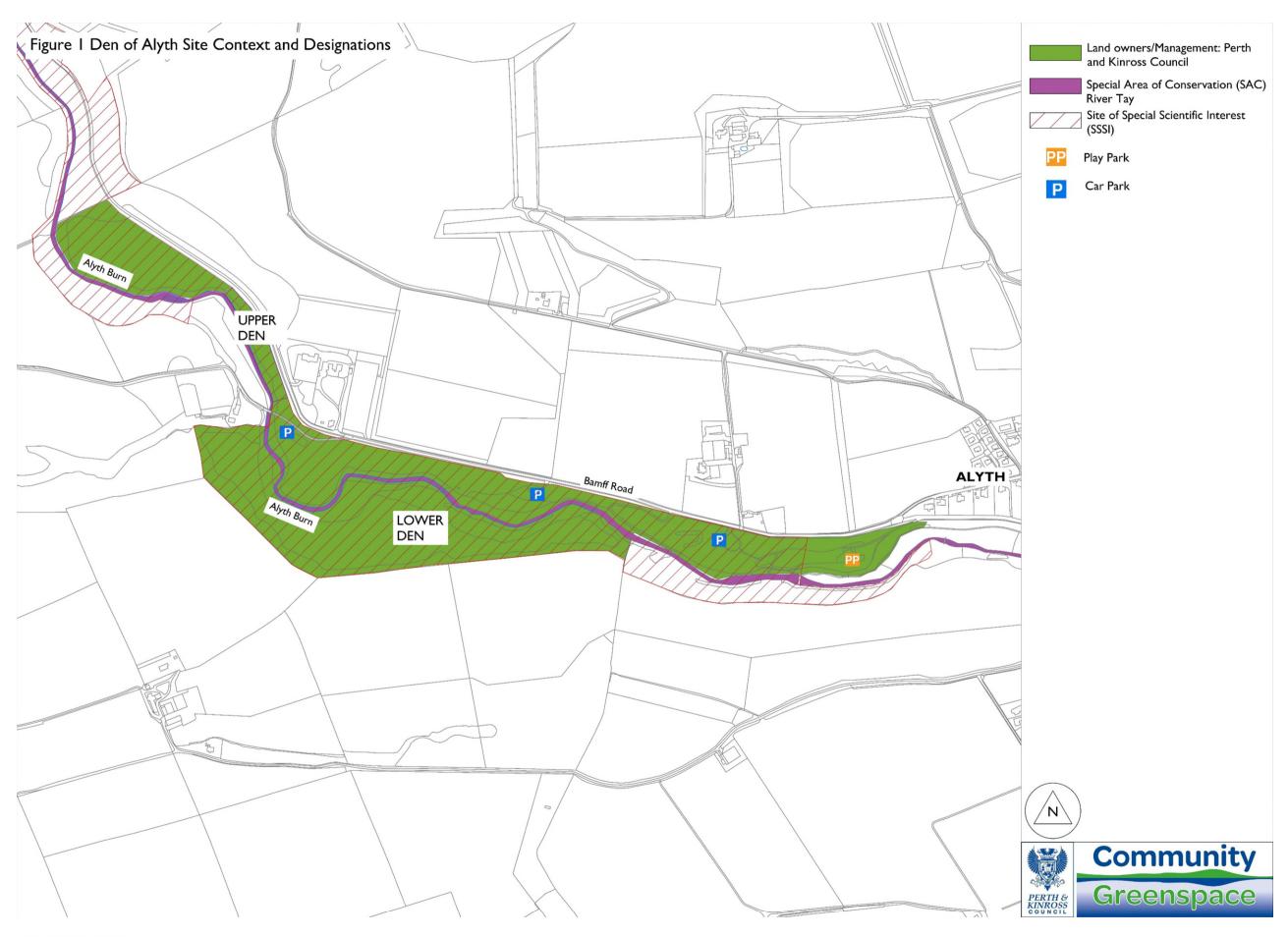




Each of these parties have been, and will continue to be, involved in the consultation and development of the Plan and actions/projects. Additionally, there has been extensive consultation within PKC as land caretakers and managers.











Designations and Planning

The Den o' Alyth is a highly valued landscape as demonstrated by its designations (Figure 1) and listed below:

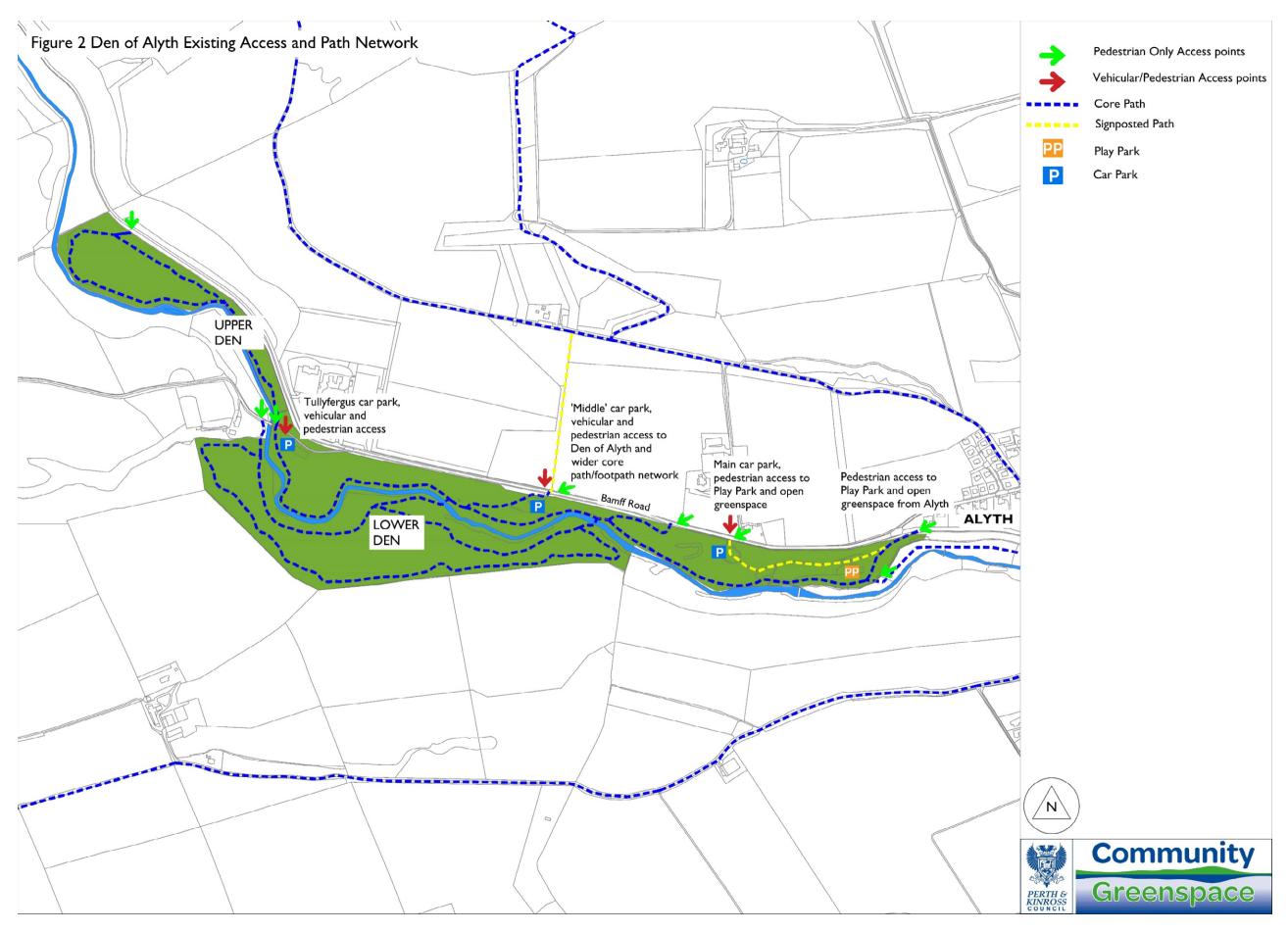
- The vast majority of the site is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
 See Ecology section.
- The entirety of the Alyth Burn within the whole of the site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). See Ecology section.
- The Den of Alyth forms a part of the Broad Valley Lowlands Tayside Landscape Area (SLA)

History and Culture

In 1923, the site was gifted to the then Alyth Town Council by the Earl of Airlie and Mr A. C. Kinloch-Smythe as a public open space, and the woodland has been managed for public amenity use since that time. In 1958 the Alyth Burn was dammed, using local voluntary labour, to provide a 'swimming pool' for use by the local community. For safety reasons this was closed in the 1970's although a weir (outwith Council ownership) still exists. Other historical land-uses on the site have included the quarrying of sandstone for local building, with one quarried area subsequently used as a landfill site by the Council, until the late 1960's.











Ecology

The Den is one of a series of wooded gorges in eastern Perth & Kinross cut into Old Red Sandstone rocks south of the Highland Boundary Fault. The site is important for its upland mixed ash woodland and cited by NatureScot (NS) as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Every SSSI is monitored to assess its condition as per a ratings system.

- 1. Favourable maintained An interest feature should be recorded as maintained when its conservation objectives were being met at the previous assessment, and are still being met.
- 2. Favourable recovered A feature of interest can be recorded as having recovered if it has regained favourable condition, having been recorded as unfavourable at the previous assessment.
- 3. Favourable declining The attribute targets set for the natural feature have been met, but evidence suggests that its condition will worsen unless remedial action is taken.
- 4. Unfavourable recovering A feature of interest can be recorded as recovering after damage if it has begun to show, or is continuing to show, a trend towards favourable condition.
- 5. Unfavourable no change An interest feature may be retained in a more-or-less steady state by repeated or continuing damage it is unfavourable but neither declining or recovering. In rare cases, an interest feature may be unable to regain its original condition following a damaging activity, but a new stable state might be achieved.
- 6. Unfavourable declining Decline is another possible consequence of a damaging activity. In this case, recovery is possible and may occur either spontaneously or if suitable management input is made.
- 7. Partially destroyed It is possible to destroy sections or areas of certain features or to destroy parts of sites with no hope of reinstatement because part of the feature itself, or the habitat or processes essential to support it, has been removed or irretrievably altered. In these cases, the remainder of the feature is given an assessed condition.
- Totally destroyed The recording of a feature as destroyed will indicate the entire interest feature has been affected to such an extent that there is no hope of recovery, perhaps because its supporting habitat or processes have been removed or irretrievably altered.

NatureScot SSSI Conditions Ratings, extract from website (ref https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/protected-areas/site-condition-monitoring/assessment-condition)

The Den links 2 km of broadleaved woodland to the west with the new planting Forestry Commission site on the hill of Alyth, and it has also been identified within the River Tay Special Area of Conservation (SAC) relating to Alyth Burn (all designations are shown on Fig 1). The burn is supplied by unnamed tributary streams, drains and groundwater seepage, its flow is characteristically quick to rise, and in higher flow levels it carries a high load of gravel and pebbles. Historical records show the river as containing Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) and brown trout (*Salmo trutta*), of which brown trout, at least, are still present. The Den's diversity of flora and fauna are of high ecological value therefore and must be considered within all management, maintenance, and user actions and





activities. NS issue guidelines on management, what actions are permitted on the site, what operations are given consent in principle, and what actions are not permitted (see Appendices). The condition of the woodland is 'unfavourable no change'[; with considered and cooperative management of the site, an improvement in this condition may be achieved.

The SSSI is mostly semi-natural mixed woodland with several plants which are locally uncommon, including lily of the valley and birds-nest orchid. The tree species within the woodland vary across the site depending on soil conditions. On the richer soils at the base and sides of the Den, ash-birch woodland has developed and covers about a quarter of the site. Sycamore is also present in the canopy here. Hazel can be common in the understorey and the ground flora is rich in species such as dog's mercury and herb bennet among others.

Beech is a major component of the non-native tree species composition, and its impact is most critical to the local ecology. Beech regeneration is considered the main cause of the unfavourable condition of the SSSI; it casts a heavy shade over much of the year and produces a thick and persistent leaf litter. There are few native species which can survive in these conditions, so where the beech is dense, the ground is often virtually devoid of vegetation. Sycamore is another species present in parts of the site, and both the beech and sycamore are regenerating. Expansion of these species leads to a loss of the semi-natural communities and the special qualities of the Den. The remainder of the site is a mix of scrub, the open water of the burn and amenity grassland and car parks.

The Den is also a Local Geodiversity Site (as a part of Tayside Geodiversity), and as such receives protection through the planning system with promotion of its geodiversity interest through the Local Development Plan. The area of interest within the Den is shown in the map below:





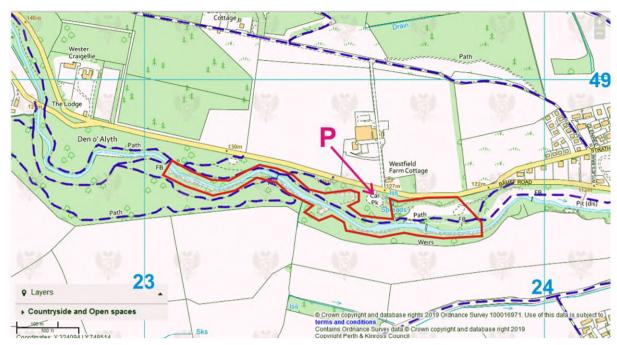


Image: Extract from PKC Local Geodiversity Site citation. Red line indicates area of interest; 'P' indicates car park.

The primary interests of geoscientific value are the Old Red Sandstone rock types, the river processes, and Basalt dyke; all to be found of 'good' to 'very good' quality.

Public Consultation

In 2021 an online public consultation was carried out and received an excellent response rate with a total of 182 respondents recorded. Comments and ideas from the local community and visitors alike were most welcome as we seek to work together for the best outcomes for the Den. Below are some highlights and the most common themes in response to key feedback questions:

Interest: 96% of respondents defined their interest in the Den as local.

<u>Time spent:</u> 75% of respondents spend between 45 minutes and 2 hours in the Den when they visit.

<u>Visitor frequency:</u> 31% of respondents said they visit several times a week in winter and 50% in the summer, closely followed by once a week and several times a month.

<u>Activity:</u> Walking/exercise and Fresh air/nature/relaxation were the main reasons for visiting along with dog walking and play.





<u>Play area:</u> 44% of respondents said they never visit the play area, with a further 20% who visit it a few times a year. 10% said they visited the play area several times a month.

<u>Paths & accessibility</u>: 47.8% of respondents described the path condition & accessibility as 'good'.

<u>Parking:</u> 44% of respondents described the condition of parking as 'good' with 13% as 'very good'.

<u>Signposts/directions</u>: 31% of respondents described the signpost and directions to site as 'good' with 22% as 'poor'.

Question (extract): What is special about the Den:

'beautiful and not overcrowded'

'not too much signage'

'the Den is peaceful and beautiful'

'the feeling of wildness'

'the tall trees, the animals, everything!'

'Knowing it is a protected SSSI'

Question (question): What would improve the visitor experience:

'upgrade the paths'

'fix landslides'

'handrails on steep paths'

'interpretation board and map in car park and entrances'

'better car park'

'more bins'

'dog litter bins'

'making a trail'

2.0 Site Use and Recreation

The Den o' Alyth plays an important recreational role for the local community and visitors alike and is relatively easily accessed from the town by pedestrians or from existing parking facilities by those travelling to the site by vehicle. The site lies within the area of the East Perthshire Path Network and Blairgowrie Core Path Plan and is linked by existing Rights of Way to the Cateran Trail. There is also an important link along quiet roads to the Drimmie Woods path of the East Perthshire Path Network. Within the woodland there are a range of route options, providing users with the potential to enjoy a range of experiences on the site. Paths range in quality from unsurfaced beaten earth routes with drainage infrastructure to





whindust surfaced paths. There is a section of surfaced single-track road from the main entrance gate at the East end of the site to the play park area. Within the woodland, there are two footbridges to cross the Alyth Burn and several short sections of boardwalk on the wettest slopes. Only the sections of path and those at the play park area could be classified as suitable for wheelchair access. The existing benches on the site provide resting places at suitable points around the site and a range of viewpoints are available. The area of mown grassland and play park on the site provide an important play area for families and young people and allow easy access to a woodland experience for those users not wishing to explore the wider woodland path network.

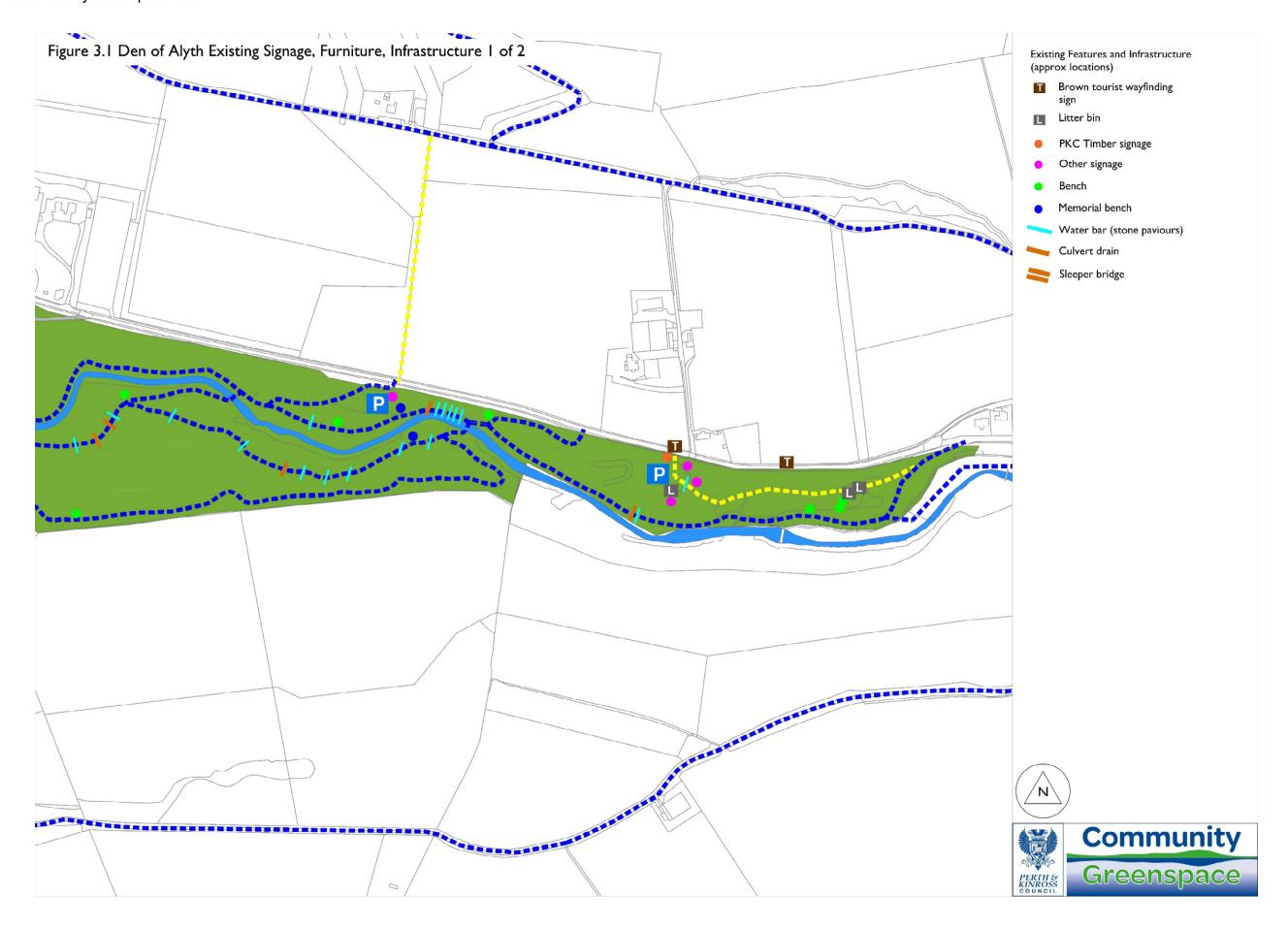
3.0 Key Issues and Existing Condition

The aim of this section is to identify the key issues within and existing condition of The Den o' Alyth. Proposals shall be described in section 4.0.

The current infrastructure on site is shown on Figs 3.1 and 3.2.

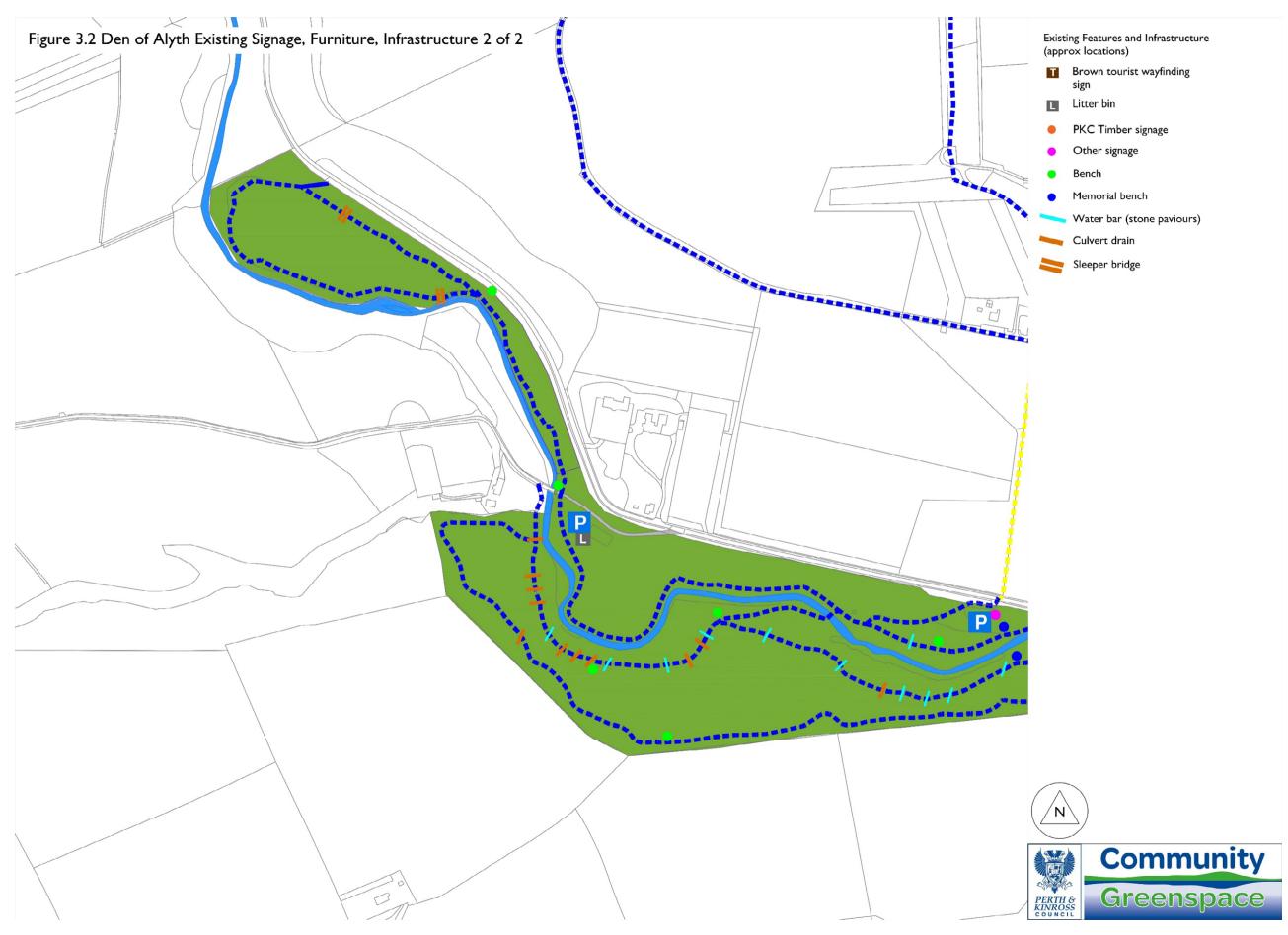






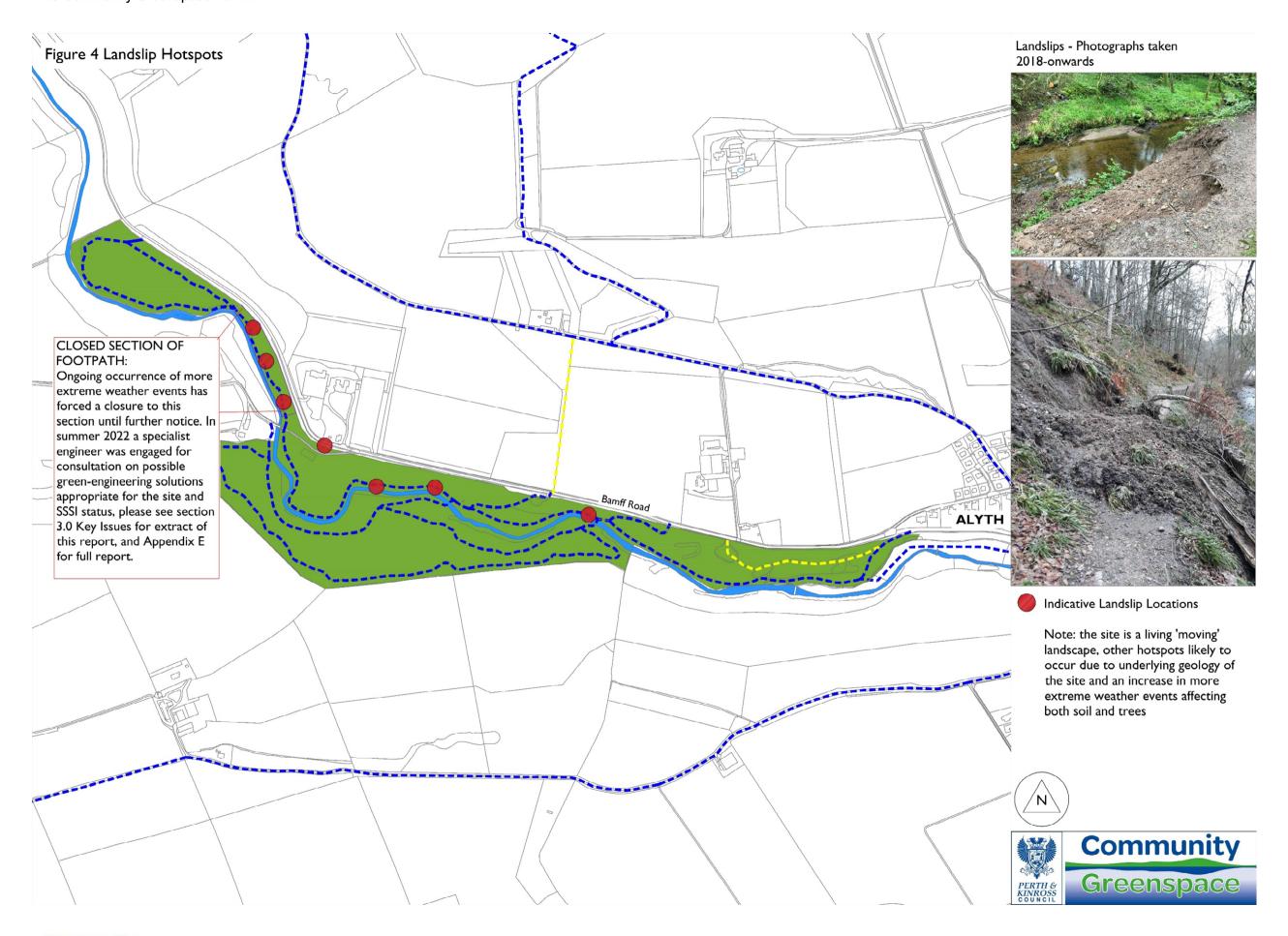
















Through consultation and site analysis, key issues were identified; proposed solutions and projects are noted on Masterplan Figure 5:

Landslips and Paths:

There are several hotspots for landslips (see Figure 4) where sections of path, including the Core Path, have fallen away or are in the ongoing process of erosion. While some sections in the Den may be considered for repair with NatureScot consultation and approval; the Upper Den is more severe. Larger sections of path are starting to fall away as part of erosion processes, accelerated by higher frequency of more extreme meteorological events.

An engineer's report was commissioned to advise on feasible options and possible solutions for managing these processes within the Den going forward, including initiating discussions with the community and landowner(s) on re-routing paths.

Extract of report received on 4th July 2022 summarising the current issues across the whole site:

"The existing path is unmade and is generally narrow and uneven, extremely so in places. There is also evidence of significant erosion (water damage) along the length of the path, with some sections washed away, loose or undermined. The evidence suggests that the erosion has principally been caused by water running off the upper slope and across the path to the burn, rather than by high water levels in the burn (although this may have been a contributory factor). (...) There is extensive evidence of slope instability uphill of the path, characterised by shallow rotational or translational slip failures, many if not all of which are still potentially active (...). The same applies downhill of the path."

The report concludes that due to the nature of the site, and furthermore due to limitations on engineering options within a SSI designation, it is not deemed efficient nor a guaranteed solution to the problem to try to 'repair' and stabilise the existing path where it is most severe and therefore closed to the public for safety reasons. Figure 6 outlines options for management of landslides and other less severe erosion spots.

Additionally, in consultation with NatureScot, a general statement on working with natural processes issued as follows: "NatureScot would be supportive of nature restoration projects, including 'rewilding' as a solution to the climate and biodiversity crisis. NatureScot recognise that our environment has fundamentally changed and will continue to change in response to climate change and other key drivers. Besides protecting land and sea, we need to work with natural processes, based on circular and regenerative processes, so that we can sequester carbon, adapt to weather extremes





and diseases, and bring back our wildlife. Any project should look to protect and enhance the designated features of Den of Alyth SSSI and NatureScot look forward to working with Perth and Kinross Council to discover how this could be made a reality."



Photo: Landslip in Upper Den

<u>Signage – Orientation and Interpretation:</u>

Welcome signage worn due to many years of service and in need of replacement at all access points both pedestrian and vehicular.







Further signage issues:

- Haphazard
- Lack of interpretation, or maps with associated waymarking
- More up-to-date information required

Access – pedestrian and vehicular:

Principal issues were found to be:

- Parking areas worn and unwelcoming (signage improvements will assist with this)
- Overnight camping with issues of waste and littering
- Fly-tipping in 'middle' car park; intermittent low usage of car park resulting in antisocial behaviour
- No accessibility information



Photo: 'Middle' Car Park

Woodland management:

PKC is currently working to the PKC Forest Plan (Appendix F) which was adopted in 2015 and consulted upon with NS. The key issues are:

- SSSI in 'Unfavourable No Change' condition mostly due to widespread presence of beech (especially high presence in Upper Den and in adjacent woodland) and sycamore that prevent natural regeneration of native species
- Increasing instances of Ash Dieback
- Falling trees with landslips







Photo: Dominant beech

Paths and Furniture:

A survey and mapping exercise revealed the following:

- Sections of path network eroded (landslip-specific damage treated separately in above section) and in need of improvement
- Drainage issues contributing to erosion of paths
- Minor bench works
- Dog waste and litter



Photo: Bench for repair or removal/replacement







Photo: Path erosion

PKC Countryside Site Maintenance & Bridge Inspections:

PKC's existing maintenance resources are finite, have been reduced as per overall Council budgets cuts, and will continue to diminish into 2024/25. They are fully committed therefore and cannot accommodate any additional maintenance work on site. By working together, volunteers are welcome to take part in additional maintenance tasks as appropriate, and/or raise funds

Current routine maintenance operations (not including exceptional items such as tree clearance works following an exceptional event, or removals/repairs for health & safety purposes, or any bridge works):

- Grass cutting multiple times per annum
- Litter collection multiple times per annum
- Leaf clearing (pathways, catchment ditches, culverts) multiple times per annum
- Bin emptying multiple times per annum
- Drainage sump clearing yearly

Bridge inspections: 50% inspected per year, with some more frequently depending on condition.

4.0 Masterplan Proposals Drawing (refer to 7.0 Action Items Table)

The following three plans outline the proposals for this site, and are summarised here:

Figure 5 outlines the three overarching themes for proposals that respond to the issues as described in the previous section. They are categorised as follows: signage, car





parks/footpaths, woodland management; and this plan highlights areas to focus on, with details shown in section 7. This figure also shows new and recent signage has been installed elsewhere in Perth & Kinross, illustrating what it would look like once implemented at the Den.

Figure 6 outlines the proposals on how to approach landslides and erosion at the Den. Option 1 is a combination of approaches in 3 parts, where all or only some may be agreed as the way forward. Option 2 is an additional possibility that would take us beyond the 5 year plan but could be commenced during that time to take forward with a pathway of funding, land permissions and re-routing of core path. In both cases, it is not feasible nor economically feasible to repair the closed section however temporarily, due to the low chances of success, accessibility, and cost.

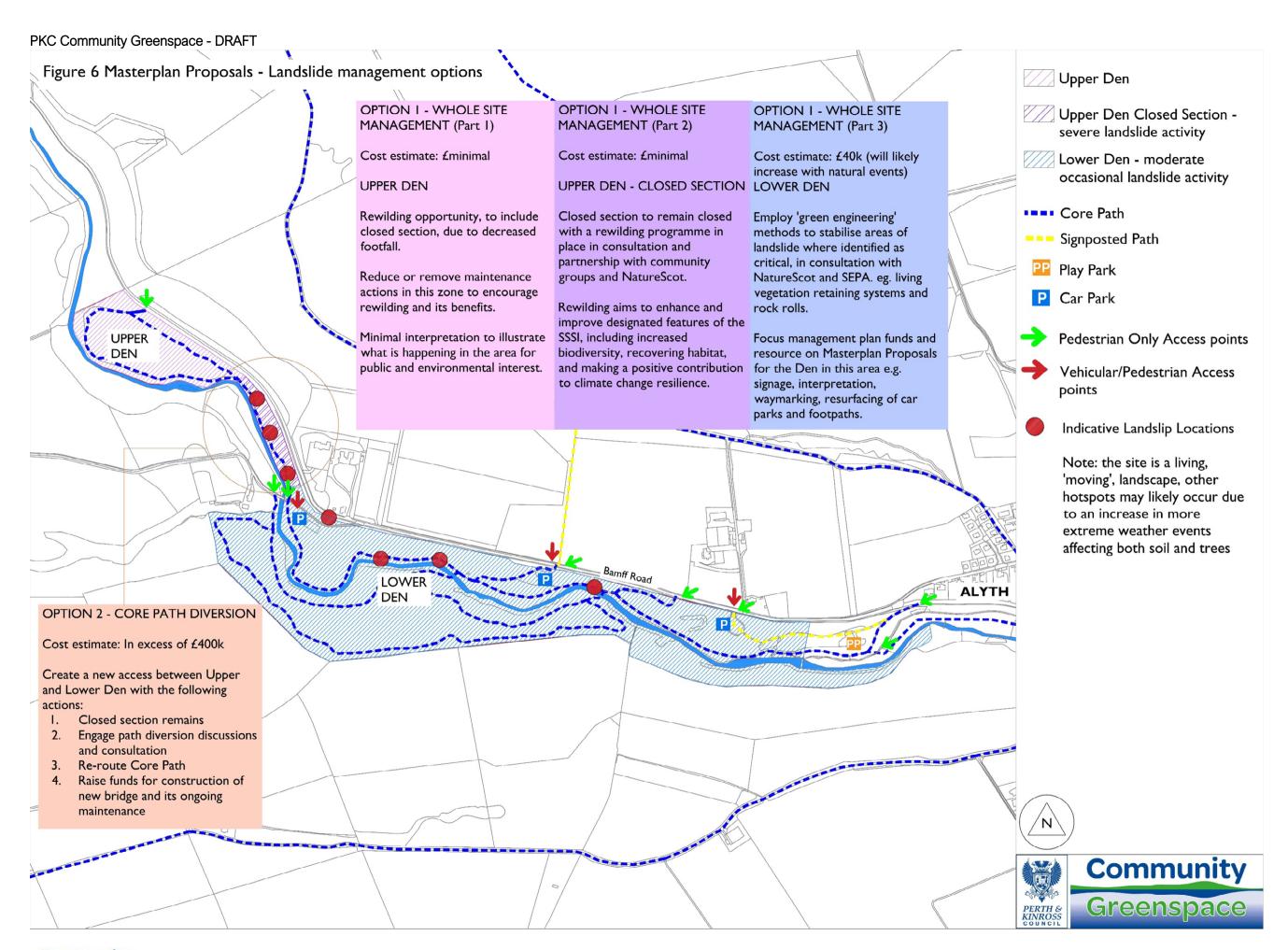
Figure 7 illustrates proposals for locations of new waymarking posts, suggested circular (loop) walks, interpretation boards/welcome signs, maps and other local information.





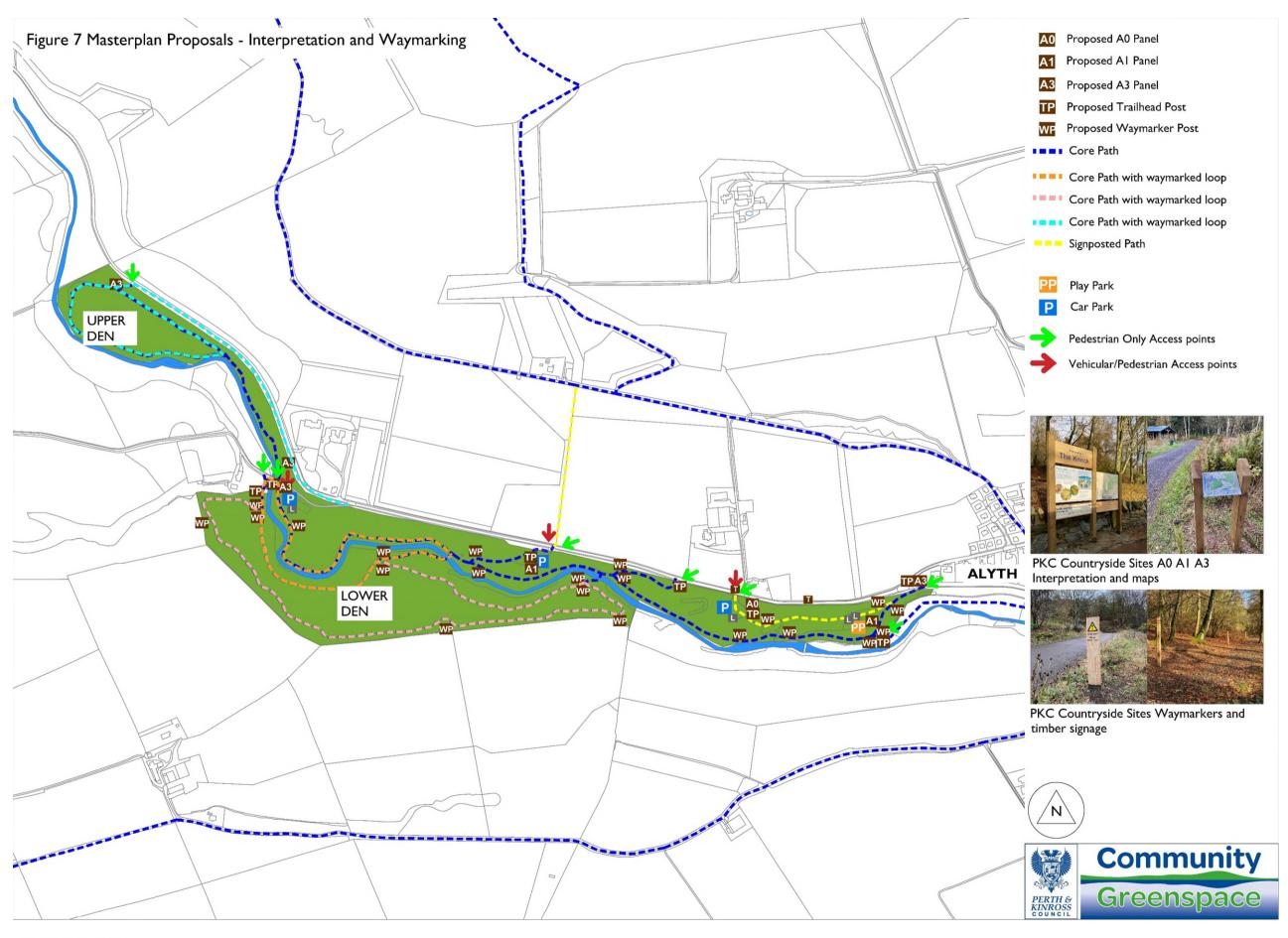












5.0 Funding

Based on the masterplans above, the following summarises the estimated costs for the proposals and is detailed in the action plan – headline figures – in a table below.

There is an opportunity for community partnership working with PKC to raise funds and identify priority works for the Den o' Alyth. The following are potential funding options available:

- PKC Capital
- WIAT (Woods In and Around Towns) woodland improvement grant) funding application for path, drainage and furniture improvements could provide funding for a large part of the cost. Although WIAT funds100%, it is understood that the rates provided will not cover the full actual cost of furniture and improvements.
- CECF (PKC Community Environment Challenge Fund)
- Habitat and Species Grant for SSSI site
- UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund) Community & Place Intervention Projects
- Drumderg Windfarm Fund
- Alyth Development Trust
- Airlie Estates
- PKCT (Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust) funds and aid fundraising (TBC)

6.0 Timescale Strategies

The council is keen to work in partnership with local communities, and groups with a keen interest in the Den, to improve their local greenspace and a range of activities that they could undertake: fundraising, practical help on the ground, skills and time. Partnership working is ever more crucial for us to achieve shared goals and ambitions for well-loved countryside sites of importance.

The timescale for the works is dependent on the availability of resources such as; PKC budget, external funding, PKC staff and contractors.

External funding is a valuable source of funding for Den o' Alyth, however it can often be variable and unpredictable. This requires a higher degree of management as there is no guarantee on the amount of funding available and





timescales may not match other funding bodies etc. With that said, the timescale is flexible and will evolve as the funding strategy is developed.

Indicative Timescale (pending resource):

- Finalise outline proposals/ Management Plan: early Spring 2023
- Detail Design work: Summer 2023/24
- Design of interpretation signage: Summer 2023
- Funding applications: Autumn 2023
- Funding applications with community involvement: Spring/Summer 2023
- Review available funding Spring 2023
- Woodland management: Autumn/Winter 2023/24 (after bird nesting season)
- Tender for hard works (paths/ signage): Summer 2023
- Tender for green engineering solutions on less severe erosion spots: summer 2023
- Other landslide works pending agreement, 2023-24/25-25 onwards, pending funding and resource

Conclusion: section 7 is a table summary of proposed actions and projects for the Den that are drawn-up with full consultation. The table features a priority rating, an approximate cost (which due to local and global circumstances may vary substantially), and a suggestion of how the projects may move forward and with involvement from whom. Teamwork is key to its successful implementation; furthermore, this document is flexible if priorities change for the proposals, and as the funding capacity and options/resource evolve over time.





PKC Community Greenspace - DRAFT 7.0 Action Plan

The following Action Plan outlines the existing condition of Den o' Alyth and identifies a) how the site could be made more welcoming through improved access and orientation (e.g. signage/ waymarking, path and entrance improvements); b) how to make progress on NS management objectives and SSSI status c) the key forest plan actions over the next five years d) the key actions to improve infrastructure with a view to reducing the longer-term maintenance burden. The recommendations are prioritised into High, Medium, Medium/ Low and Low, on the basis of consultation and consensus. The total estimated costs are approximately £180k and are indicative as items and prices may change.

Item No.	Location	Existing condition	Priority	Outline Proposal	Key Actions/ Next steps	Who could do the work	Approximate cost
	Signage: Orientation						
1	Path routes/Orientations	The path network requires new and additional directional posts along with maps at key locations	High	Remove all existing signage and develop new strategy as outlined in the Plan	Agree requirements, and locations as set out in the Plan	PKC Community Greenspace/Use of contractor	Approx costs: £15k Eligible UKSPF/ PKC/WIAT funding: £TBC approx.
	Car Parks: Welcome and Interpretation						
2	Main Car Park	Increase in overnight camping	Med	Install height restriction barrier at Main Car Park	Appoint contractor with agreed specification	PKC Community Greenspace/Use of contractor	Approx costs: £5k Eligible PKC/WIAT funding: £TBC approx.
3	Main and 'Middle' Car Parks	Poor welcome	High	Create welcoming entrance/sense of place at car park with introduction of improved	Agree design detail and consult	PKC Community Greenspace /Use of contractor	Approx costs £35k Eligible UKSPF/PKC/WIAT funding: £TBC approx.





	ommunity Greenspa Location	ce - DRAFT Existing condition	Priority	Outline Proposal	Key Actions/ Next steps	Who could do the work	Approximate cost
4	Tullyfergus Car Park	Poor welcome	High	interpretation and new maps Create welcoming entrance/sense of place at car park with introduction of improved interpretation and new maps	Agree design detail and consult	PKC Community Greenspace /Use of contractor	Approx costs: £4k Eligible UKSPF/PKC/WIAT funding: £TBC approx.
5	Woodland Managem Whole Den	nent Survey extent of Ash dieback	High	Survey during spring and summer periods Create Ash management plan in line with	Commission survey	PKC Community Greenspace /contractor/consultant	Approx cost: £2k Eligible UKSPF/Nature Restoration Fund funding: £TBC approx
6	Upper and Lower Den	Substantial beech regeneration	High	National Guidance Remove all beech <10cm DBH, concentrating on areas where diverse ground flora apparent Remove all beech <10cm DBH in steeply	Ongoing Identify zones and compartments and with ref to NS recommendations	PKC Community Greenspace /Volunteers/Use of contractor	Approx costs: £3k Eligible Nature Restoration Fund WIAT funding: £TBC approx





	ommunity Greenspa Location	Existing condition	Priority	Outline Proposal	Key Actions/ Next steps	Who could do the work	Approximate cost
				sloped areas (ref PKC Forest Plan)			
	Infrastructure						
7	Paths	Sections of paths in poor condition due to run-off/surface water erosion and general wear and tear	High	Approx 40% of total surface area to be resurfaced and re-graded where necessary Including installation of cross falls and drainage features where necessary	Funding and tender package/specification as per SSSI requirements	Use of contractor	Approx Costs: £50k Eligible UKSPF/PKC/WIAT funding: £TBC approx
	Timber retaining walls	Sections of walls old and deteriorating	Med	Replace retaining timber walls with upgrade retaining structure	Employ engineer services for spec and tender for implementation where necessary	PKC Community Greenspace, Contractor Engineer	Approx Costs: £7k PKC/WIAT funding: £TBC approx
	Car Parks						
8	All Car Parks	Surfacing in poor condition	High	Resurface all car parks	Rationalise car park edging to re-design for resurfacing	PKC Community Greenspace /Contractor	Approx Costs: £50k Eligible UKSPF/PKC/WIAT





PKC Community Greenspace - DRAFT							
Item No.	Location	Existing condition	Priority	Outline Proposal	Key Actions/ Next steps	Who could do the work	Approximate cost
							funding: £TBC approx
	Erosion/Landslide Management						
9	Upper Den Closed section of path	Section of path between Lower and Upper Den entirely closed due to landslides; events increasing	High	Refer to Fig 6	Consultation	PKC Community Greenspace	TBC
10	Lower Den areas of erosion	Zones of erosion and landslips, occurrences different locations	High	Utilise 'green engineering' stabilisation methods appropriate to SSSI and natural context e.g. live vegetation retaining systems and rock rolls	Engage engineer for specific zones to obtain appropriate methods and cost estimate	Specialist contractor/engineer	Approx Costs: £50k Eligible UKSPF/PKC/WIAT funding: £TBC approx





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