

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

19 February 2015

Report by Director of Environment

WHITELEE ACCESS PLAN 2015-2019

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Cabinet for their approval the Whitelee Access Plan 2015-2019.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet:
  - (a) approves the Whitelee Access Plan 2015-2019 and the implementation of the proposals contained therein; and
  - (b) notes that whilst the project has an on-going funding requirement, that this figure be reduced to 40% of developer contributions annually from the current 50% allocation.

**BACKGROUND**

3. Scottish Power received Planning Permission from the Scottish Executive in April 2006 to erect 140 wind turbines at Whitelee Forest on Eaglesham Moor. Construction commenced in September 2006 and the windfarm and visitor centre opened to the public in September 2009.

4. Whitelee windfarm lies to the south of Eaglesham within the boundaries of the 3 local authority areas of East Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and East Ayrshire. The windfarm was extended with a further 75 turbines between 2010-2013 and remains the largest on-shore facility of its type in the UK and the second largest in Europe.

5. The original Planning Permission was the subject of a Section 75 Legal Agreement between the 3 Councils, Scottish Power Renewables and landowners within the site and addresses a number of issues, including developer contributions payable to the 3 Councils to mitigate any adverse impact of the windfarm. The Legal Agreement requires the preparation and implementation of an Access Action Plan to establish a network of recreational access routes and associated facilities within the windfarm site and the surrounding area, and requires the Access Plan to be updated at 5 year intervals.

6. A Whitelee Access Planning Group (WAPG) was established in July 2006 to oversee the preparation of the Access Action Plan. This group comprised representatives from the 3 Councils, landowners and community representatives. A Whitelee Access Project Officer, with responsibility for preparing and implementing the Access Action Plan, was appointed in January 2008 and the post is hosted by East Renfrewshire Council. An Access Action Plan for the period 2009-14 was prepared and approved by Cabinet in April 2009.

7. In addition to physical improvements, a dedicated Countryside Ranger Service was established in 2010 and is hosted by East Renfrewshire Council. The Service has been a considerable asset in increasing the profile of Whitelee, which currently attracts an estimated 100,000 visitors annually.

## **REPORT**

8. Attached as Appendix 1 to this report is the proposed Whitelee Access Plan for the period 2015-2019 which updates the earlier 2009-2014 plan, as required by the Section 75 agreement.

### **Future Actions**

9. The network of windfarm and forest roads, now extending to over 140km, continue to be the main focus for recreational activity. The Access Plan continues to target path developments, gaps in provision, improved links to local communities and other visitor infrastructure including car parking, signage, interpretation and improved toilet facilities.

10. Proposals also seek to further develop the activities of the countryside ranger service including events and environmental education, and the expansion of the service to include a seasonal ranger.

### **Maintenance**

11. Maintenance of access infrastructure is important to ensure that this recreational resource is safe and fulfils its potential as a major attraction. Each local authority is responsible for maintenance of infrastructure in their respective areas.

### **Spend Profile**

12. It is proposed that the share of developer contributions from the windfarm allocated to access infrastructure projects be reduced from the current 50% level to a reduced figure of 40% to help increase the income available to the community benefit fund, with allocations reviewed after 3 years.

## **FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY**

13. All costs associated with Access Plan implementation are to be met from developer contributions in line with Section 75 Agreement linked to the Whitelee windfarm development. It is proposed that the current allocation of windfarm fund income towards site infrastructure projects be reduced from the current level of 50% to 40%.

## **CONSULTATION**

14. The updated 2015-2019 Access Plan is a continuation of the earlier Access Action Plan which was subject to formal public consultation in 2008. Broad aims and objectives remain substantially unchanged.

## **PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

15. The Access Project is overseen by a Whitelee Access Planning Group which represents a range of public, private and community interests.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS**

16. The Access Plan proposes that the current Countryside Ranger Service be expanded to allow the addition of a seasonal post from 2015/16. A new funding model in which East Ayrshire Council contribute directly to the Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service is proposed and would offset the cost of this additional staff member. No property, IT, sustainability, finance or other issues have been identified.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

17. The updated Access Plan details the priorities for the 2015-2019 period and will continue to develop the Whitelee area as a focus for recreation, environmental education, events and other activities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

18. It is recommended that the Cabinet:
- (a) approves the Whitelee Access Plan 2015-2019 and the implementation of the proposals contained therein; and
  - (b) notes that whilst the project has an on-going funding requirement, that this figure be reduced to 40% of developer contributions annually, from the current 50% allocation.

Director of Environment

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## **KEY WORDS**

A report recommending approval of the Whitelee Access Plan 2015-2019, making reference to the Whitelee Access Planning Group, the Countryside Ranger Service and developer contributions. Appendix 1.

# Whitelee Access Plan

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2015-2019

# Whitelee Access Plan 2015-2019

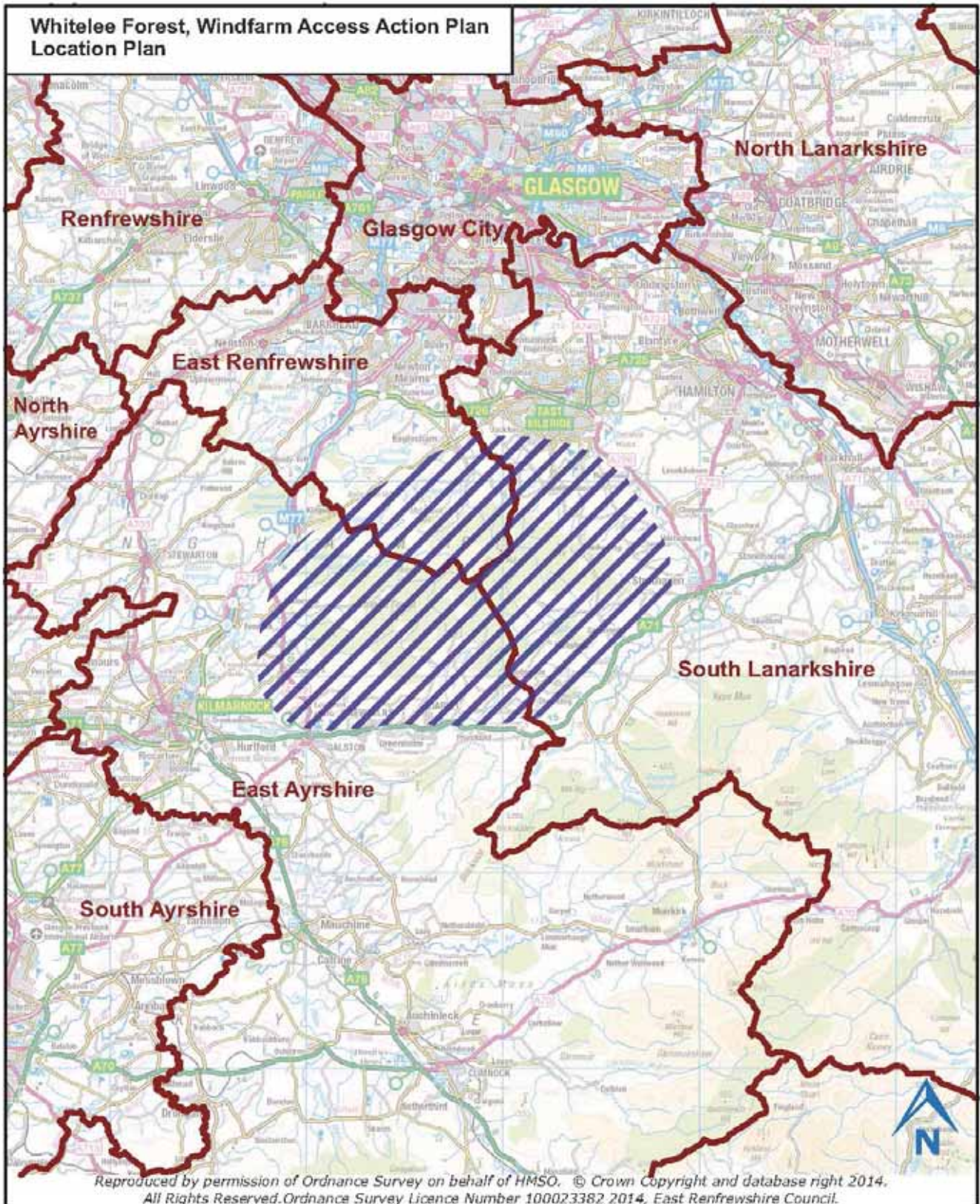
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**APPENDIX 1** WHITELEE ACCESS PLAN 2015-2019 – MAP

**APPENDIX 2** INCOME & EXPENDITURE 2009-2014

**APPENDIX 3** PROJECT BUDGET 2015-2019



## 1. INTRODUCTION

This Access Plan is the second such plan for Whitelee, following the inaugural 2009-2014 Plan published in February 2009. At the time of opening in September 2009 Whitelee was the largest on-shore windfarm in Europe and remains the largest in the UK. The site's popularity has grown steadily in the period since 2009, with the site currently attracting in the region of 100,000 visitors per annum.



This second plan provides an opportunity to review progress to date and recommend actions for the 5 year period 2015-2019. It is intended to further develop the Whitelee area as a focus for recreational activity and in doing so to deliver a range of benefits to local communities and visitors from further afield.

## 2. BACKGROUND

In 2006 CRE Energy (a subsidiary of Scottish Power) received planning permission to construct a 140 turbine windfarm within Whitelee Forest and Eaglesham Moor. The windfarm, which extended across the boundaries of 3 local authority areas, was recognised early in the planning process as having the potential to deliver substantial community benefits given its proximity to local communities and larger population centres. A commitment to develop the site to deliver these benefits became a key element of the negotiated community

benefit linked to the windfarm development.

The original windfarm proposal comprised 140 turbines with a combined capacity of 322MW. A development on this scale required a substantial network of roads to service turbines and related infrastructure including cabling, resulting in a hub of new internal roads which would become a focus for recreational use post-construction. This network of roads extended to an initial ~90km but has since been extended with the later expansion of the windfarm.

To cater for the predicted high levels of public use a dedicated visitor centre was constructed at Queenseat Hill to the west of Eaglesham, East Renfrewshire.

The Whitelee area has undergone significant changes in the period since 2009. Two windfarm extensions were constructed concurrently between 2010–2013, adding a further 75 turbines to increase the site's installed capacity to 539MW. Meanwhile a number of smaller windfarms have been developed immediately to the north and south of Whitelee and another consented to the southwest.



Extensions to Whitelee windfarm and the on-going expansion of forest roads for timber extraction have expanded the internal road network from an initial 90km to over 140km. Forestry activity has been widespread throughout the period linked both to windfarm developments themselves and to rotational felling and re-stocking, transforming many areas of the site over the period.

The inaugural Plan proposed a range of actions comprising both physical site works and wider actions to encourage and

support public use of the site. Many of the proposed physical improvements have been hindered by delays associated with legal agreements between landowners and local authorities. Where landowner agreements have been forthcoming a number of physical site works have been completed and well received by site users, including the recent development of mountain biking trails.

In conjunction with these physical works, substantial progress has been made against wider actions to encourage and support public use of the site. Important amongst these has been the establishment of a countryside ranger service in 2010, which has played a key role in delivering against these wider objectives.

### 3. SITE DESCRIPTION

The area covered by this Access Plan includes parts of East Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and East Ayrshire Council areas. Whilst the main focus for recreational activity is Whitelee windfarm itself, access proposals also sought to better integrate the windfarm development into wider provision of public access. In doing so the access plan overlaps with other initiatives, both existing and proposed, beyond the immediate windfarm and forest area.

The expanded Whitelee windfarm now extends across an area of close to 80km<sup>2</sup>. Whilst the windfarm is a dominant feature in landscape terms the combined footprint of service roads and turbine bases is relatively low at less than 2%, allowing historic land use activities to continue across the site. Open moorland and commercial forest continue to be the main types of land use, with extensive areas of open grazing towards the west. A number of important water catchments extend into the windfarm boundary.

The majority of forestry interests form part of the national forest estate, publicly owned and managed by Forestry Commission Scotland through their

Lowlands Forest District. A number of smaller, privately owned areas of forest are also present, with a large area of open moorland towards the centre of the windfarm also in private ownership.

A number of waterbodies are present towards the western end of Whitelee, Lochgoin reservoir lying within the windfarm boundary and Dunwan Dam and Craigendunton reservoirs immediately outside. Together these form part of an extensive Scottish Water landholding of water catchments and reservoirs.



The majority of Whitelee windfarm lies at elevations of more than 250m, rising to 376 metres at its highest point at Corse Hill. Slopes are generally modest although some steeper gullies exist towards the fringes of the forest to the north and south. Ground conditions are highly variable, peat dominating in many areas and present to depths of up to 9m. The resulting, poor ground conditions limit recreational opportunities to surfaced routes across much of the site and also has a major bearing on the construction of site roads and paths, requiring a floating construction and use of geotextile layers to support the formation.

Over the period of the inaugural 5 year Access Plan substantial areas of forest have been felled. Whilst in some areas felling is linked to the expansion of the windfarm and road network, elsewhere it forms part of the normal forest rotation with many areas of forest reaching maturity over the period. This has led to further expansion of the forest road network to facilitate harvesting and restocking operations. The timber crop is unstable in many areas, associated with a



high water table and weak substrate, resulting in a relatively high incidence of windblow.

The movement of many forested areas into a second rotation, coupled with premature harvesting linked to the windfarm infrastructure and an extensive Habitat Management Area have accelerated the process of forest restructuring. This provides an opportunity for the forest to be modified over time and a greater diversity of species and structure to be introduced. This process will provide a more varied forest in the future and deliver additional benefits in terms of landscape, wildlife and recreational value.

Whitelee is surrounded by a predominantly agricultural area where historic rights of way, many of which had fallen into disrepair, and a network of minor public roads provide the main links to Whitelee from neighbouring communities. The western end of Whitelee windfarm has good links to the M77 motorway, which lies only 3 miles west of Whitelee Visitor Centre, whilst a number of smaller forest and windfarm entrances exist on all sides of the development and provide potential access points for visitors.

## 4. PLANNING CONTEXT

### 4.1. OBLIGATIONS

The potential to improve public access was recognised early in the planning process for Whitelee windfarm. Public consultation associated with a Path Planning Study in 2002 indicated strong support within local communities for Whitelee being a catalyst for wide-ranging recreational improvements. A commitment to deliver improved and better-integrated access became a key element of the community benefits linked to the windfarm development, with commitments to prepare and implement an Access Action Plan enshrined within a Section 75 agreement between the

developer, landowners and the 3 local authorities.

In light of these commitments, Clause 8.1 of the Section 75 agreement placed an obligation on the developer to establish an Access Planning Group which was to have responsibility for overseeing the development and implementation of an Access Plan. The Whitelee Access Planning Group met for the first time in 2006 and represents a range of public, private and community interests. Current membership is comprised of the 3 local authorities affected by the windfarm (East Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire & East Ayrshire Councils), Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Power Renewables, Eaglesham & Waterfoot Community Council, Darvel Community Council and the Irvine Valley Regeneration Partnership.

The Access Plan, detailing the provision, upgrading and maintenance of access and recreation facilities, is part of a long term commitment covering the 25 year operational life of the windfarm. The plan requires to be reviewed at 5 year intervals throughout this period.

### 4.2. IMPLEMENTATION

Clause 8.2 of the Section 75 agreement places an obligation on East Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and East Ayrshire Councils to lead implementation of the Access Action Plan. A Project Officer was employed on an initial 3 year contract and the post hosted by East Renfrewshire Council in their role as lead partner.

Project costs were to be met through additional developer contributions received during the 3 year windfarm construction period and ring-fenced by local authorities for this purpose. The level of developer contributions was based on the Path Planning Study of 2002 and the cost of implementing indicative access proposals. Bringing forward developer contributions to cover the construction phase of the windfarm ensured access improvements were fully funded and not

delivered at the expense of wider community benefits.

The development of access infrastructure would bring with it additional and on-going maintenance obligations. To ensure these obligations could be met over the long-term, developer contributions paid throughout the operational life of the windfarm included additional sums to meet these costs. This ensured that both initial project implementation and future maintenance obligations were adequately resourced.

### 4.3 CONSULTATION

Public consultation played a valuable role in developing the earliest access proposals for Whitelee and in informing priorities in the period since. Two formal periods of public consultation have taken place, the first in 2002 linked to the development of the 'Eaglesham and Whitelee Forest Path Planning Study', the second in 2008 linked to the development of the inaugural Whitelee Access Plan. In both cases input from the landowners, user groups and public agencies have allowed proposals to be influenced and modified.

The opportunity to influence proposals has not been limited to these formal consultation periods noted above. Links with user groups and representative bodies have enabled specific proposals to be discussed on an on-going basis and for priorities to be identified. Recent initiatives to improve facilities for both equestrian users and mountain bikers, for example, have involved dialogue with a wide range of potential users and representative bodies. This process should continue in the future to ensure developments continue to be targeted and meet the expectations of local communities and other users.

## 5. PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The inaugural Access Plan was developed in late 2008 and early 2009, with

windfarm construction on-going and the site still closed to the public. In planning for future access provision a number of broad assumptions were therefore necessary in terms of likely visitor demand, future patterns of access and associated infrastructure requirements.

Whilst the majority of earlier assumptions appear well founded, nonetheless there is a need to review and where necessary modify proposals for the next 5 years in response to the many physical changes that have taken place, patterns of public access which since become established and a range of issues and opportunities which have since presented themselves.

The 2009-14 Access Plan emphasised the importance of bringing this basic site infrastructure to an appropriate standard, particularly given the degraded nature of many routes, site entrances and the lack of basic facilities such as signage and car parking in many areas. The aim was to provide attractive and robust recreational infrastructure, capable of meeting both the demands placed upon it and the expectations of visitors.

The extent of new or upgraded paths proposed within the inaugural access plan was modest in overall terms, particularly set against the substantial network of windfarm and forest roads. Where pathworks were proposed they were carefully targeted towards gaps in provision and where improvements would provide greatest benefit.

Much of the focus was instead on other forms of visitor provision including signage and interpretation, attractive and welcoming site entrances, improved car parking provision and additional facilities such as viewpoints to add interest and provide a high quality visitor offering.

Beyond this physical infrastructure itself, considerable emphasis was placed on wider actions to encourage and support recreational use, including the creation of a site-based ranger service to assist in the delivery of wider benefits.

## 6 WHITELEE ACCESS ACTION PLAN 2009-14 REVIEW

### 6.1 IMPLEMENTATION

The inaugural Access Plan included a broad range of actions, comprising both physical improvements and wider actions to encourage and support recreational use. The majority of physical improvements to date have been in the western areas of Whitelee, in the vicinity of Whitelee Visitor Centre and Lochgoin reservoir.

Whilst the western area of Whitelee is undoubtedly the main gateway into the windfarm, under the greatest visitor pressure and drawing visitors from all sides of the development, delays associated with legal agreements between local authorities and landowners have prevented progress in many other areas of the site.

The resulting lack of visitor facilities is likely to have influenced patterns of access which have since developed, with the continued presence of poor quality entrances and a lack of basic facilities preventing a more balanced spread of recreational use across the site.

The continued absence of a legal agreement between local authorities and Forestry Commission Scotland has been a particular issue, delaying works across Whitelee Forest which represents the largest single landholding within the project area. The forest contains a number of entrances, existing and proposed, rights of way and strategically important routes. The completion of works within Whitelee Forest was considered a priority from the outset and critical to the delivery of wider improvements.

In spite of delays outlined above and their impact on physical site works a number of important developments have been possible, as has progress against wider objectives to develop Whitelee as a popular venue for an increasingly wide

range of recreational activity. The network of existing routes and facilities, new infrastructure delivered since 2009 and the wide range of activities and events on offer have contributed to the site's popularity and visitor numbers in the region of 100,000 per annum. Whitelee is actively promoted by a number of partner organisations, with recreational activity well supported by a range of maps, leaflets and other resources.

Amongst the site works delivered to date is the creation of a viewpoint and associated works at Blackwood Hill, providing a popular and accessible facility within easy reach of Whitelee Visitor Centre. The centrepiece of the viewpoint is a bronze toposcope, reputed to be amongst the most detailed in the UK.



The recent development of a network of purpose-built mountain biking (MTB) trails have proved extremely popular, delivered in response to strong pressure from communities on all sides of Whitelee for such a facility. This was identified as early as 2002 as a priority for local communities, so the development in 2014 of a network of trails close to Whitelee Visitor Centre has been an important development both for Whitelee and the wider area. Led by the same designers responsible for the Beijing Olympic and Glasgow Commonwealth courses, the venue provides a safe facility for the general public, schools and other groups.

A series of permanent orienteering courses have been developed across the Lochgoin area in partnership with a local

orienteering club. These provide a series of courses for different levels of experience ranging from short beginner course to a more demanding 10km course.



This second access plan for Whitelee can for the first time be informed by existing use of the site, drawing on the experiences over the period of the earlier 5 year plan. On-going monitoring and feedback from site users have identified a range of issues and opportunities. Whilst many are relevant to all users, others are more specific to particular user groups. Section 7 considers existing recreational use of Whitelee from the context of the main user groups and will inform management priorities for the next 5 years.

## 6.2 WHITELEE COUNTRYSIDE RANGER SERVICE

The previous Access Action Plan highlighted the importance of a site-based ranger service to support delivery of wider project aims and objectives. A new ranger service comprising 2 full-time staff was established in early 2010 and a site office created close to Whitelee Visitor Centre. Ranger service staff are employed by East Renfrewshire Council, with an additional ranger employed by East Ayrshire Council for much of the earlier plan period. Support and occasional staff cover is provided on an ad-hoc basis by existing ranger services across the 3 local authority areas and by Forestry Commission Scotland.

Countryside rangers have a vital role to play in the development and promotion of Whitelee and in supporting recreational use across the site. They are a visible site presence, a primary point of contact for many site users and are responsible for the delivery of events and wider activities which significantly raise the profile of the site and attract both new and repeat visitors. From the outset ranger service staff have delivered a varied and imaginative programme of events suited to a wide range of audiences, with this programme being developed and expanded year-on-year.



The programme includes over 30 events spanning recreational, cultural or historical events, childrens' activities, survival and bushcraft, natural history and many others. Events take place on all sides of the site, attracting participants from all 3 local authority areas and beyond.



Schools, further education establishments and voluntary groups are amongst the

many that benefit from environmental education activities. The provision of environmental education is a key aim of the ranger service and the number of group visits continues to grow year-on-year.



These activities compliment separate education programmes run through Whitelee Visitor Centre, with the ranger service providing more outdoor-focussed learning linked to the Curriculum for Excellence. Common subject areas include Habitats and Ecosystems, Sustainability and Wind & Water but with tailored sessions being provided to suit a wide range of audiences. Site-based activity is supplemented by outreach work within the school environment. A total of 60 groups were hosted in 2013.

Countryside rangers conduct a range of biological and protected species monitoring, contributing to a greater understanding of Whitelee and recording many new species in the process. Survey results are shared with external organisations including Plantlife, British Trust for Ornithology, the Biological Records Centre, Butterfly Conservation and Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Their intimate knowledge of the site and its wealth of habitats and species has further diversified events and environmental education activities.

Volunteering opportunities have been provided at the request of a number of groups or individuals, covering site survey, maintenance or smaller-scale environmental improvements. Regular volunteering opportunities continue to be

provided to vulnerable adults and other groups, with others linked to established schemes such as John Muir awards.

The countryside ranger service plays a lead role in the delivery of larger events, overseeing the permissions process and working closely with partners, landowners and event organisers. Support is provided to organisers from initial proposals through the successful delivery of events. This has seen a number of successful and often high profile events being delivered at Whitelee in the period since 2009.

With an increasing amount of visitor infrastructure being developed, site maintenance plays an important part of the day-to-day duties of ranger service staff. As the extent of such infrastructure is further increased during the period of this second access plan a corresponding increase in the level of maintenance activity can be anticipated.



The success of the ranger service's Stroller Striders initiative has been particularly noteworthy. The project encourages parents or carers of young children to take part in a weekly walking group. Almost 300 members have enrolled with the group since its inception in 2011, many since re-joining for a second time. Aside from the obvious success of such a vibrant and well attended group, its contribution to wider health and well-being has been recognised by external agencies with the initiative

being highlighted as a model of best practice.



The popularity of Whitelee to date, and of the many events and initiatives has been assisted by a substantial web presence and the effective use of social media and other channels to reach a diverse audience. The Countryside Ranger Service remain at the forefront of many of these efforts and have established a strong following through social media.

Given the importance of the countryside ranger service in delivering wide ranging benefits, consideration should be given to expanding the service through the establishment of a seasonal post to increase capacity. This is further discussed in Section 8.

### **6.3 INCOME & EXPENDITURE 2009-2014**

Appendix 2 shows income and expenditure for the 2009-14 period. Earlier project costs for the period 2007/08 and 2008/09 are also shown in order to capture all income and expenditure to date. Project costs are met by East Renfrewshire Council in the first instance, with pro-rata contributions then received from partner authorities towards the end of each financial year.

The delayed implementation of many site works led to a substantial underspend over the 2009-14 plan period. Overall project expenditure to the end of 2013/14 was £812,457 compared to a projected expenditure of £1,840,686 within 2009-14 access plan. Expenditure to the end of

December 2014 is projected to be £1,071,527.

It should be noted that incurred expenditure includes the mountain biking project at Brown Hill, with construction costs straddling 2013/14 and early 2014/15. This project received substantial additional funding from both East Renfrewshire LEADER and East Renfrewshire Council, off-setting the cost of site works by £144,093 and thus reducing the impact on existing project budgets. This is reflected in the proportionately lower contributions of partner authorities during 2013/14 and early 2014/15.

Income over the period 2009-14 includes contributions from each of the local authorities, using allocations received from the windfarm developers for the purposes of implementing access proposals. In most cases project expenditure (excluding ranger service costs) are shared on a pro-rata basis based on the distribution of turbines across the 3 local authority areas and the resulting distribution of developer contributions. As noted above, and since the costs of the mountain biking trails project were an addition to the 2009-14 Access Plan proposals, additional funding was secured to off-set the majority of project costs. Grant income of £45,000 was received from ER LEADER project, an additional £89,326 of ERC windfarm allocations used and a further £9,767 contribution from ERC budgets.

Expenditure on site works during the 2009-14 period includes MTB development and implementation, viewpoint, toposcope and associated works at Blackwood Hill, pathworks, entrance improvements, signage and interpretation, gates, access controls and fencing, pedestrian and vehicle counters, seating, orienteering courses, waste bins, leaflet dispensers and the construction of on-site accommodation for project staff.

Throughout the 2009-14 access plan period ranger service costs were split pro-rata between East Renfrewshire Council

(64%) and South Lanarkshire Council (36%), with East Ayrshire Council providing separate ranger support for part of the period. Following initial establishment costs in 2010/11 ranger service expenditure has fallen to ~£75,000 per annum over the remainder of the period.

## 7 EXISTING RECREATIONAL USE

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Visitor numbers to Whitelee have remained consistently high since the windfarm opened to the public in 2009, with an average 75,000 visitors to Whitelee Visitor Centre and over 50,000 using the site for recreational purposes every year. With some obvious overlap between these figures, it is estimated that the number of unique visits to Whitelee is currently in the region of 100,000 per annum.



Recreational use of the site is dominated by walking and cycling although a number of other uses are commonplace including running, horseriding, orienteering, geocaching and canicross amongst others. Many visitors are attracted by the site's wealth of cultural and historical features and its wildlife, whilst Whitelee's obvious renewable energy credentials remain a significant driver for first-time visitors in particular.

Whilst current visitor numbers are encouraging, there is little doubt that the site's scale and extensive route network can support much greater visitor numbers and activity. In line with planning commitments, Whitelee is actively promoted by a number of project partners for recreational use. This was a key element of the mitigation measures and benefits linked to the windfarm development and partners must continue their commitment to delivering these benefits.

In some areas of the site the quality of road surfacing is inconsistent with the recreational uses for which the network is being promoted, or to a site attracting such substantial visitor numbers as Whitelee currently does. The suitability of routes for particular types of use is strongly influenced by surface quality, with poor surfaces impacting on different users to varying degrees. Loose, unconsolidated surfaces for example present particular problems for equestrian users and less experienced cyclists.

It should, however, be recognised that Whitelee is a working landscape, with a range of windfarm, forestry, agricultural and other interests continuing both within the windfarm boundary and beyond. Where there is a peak in activity, notably forest harvesting and haulage, then public access will be constrained and some temporary deterioration of the road network can reasonably be expected. It is unrealistic on a network as extensive as that at Whitelee that all routes can be maintained to a high standard at all times.

With the wider site promoted for recreational use in line with planning commitments, partners responsible for managing routes must nevertheless seek to balance the sometimes competing demands of tourism and land management. Particular effort should be directed towards popular routes and strategically important links.

The windfarm operators have made significant efforts in improving roads

within the Lochgoin area, particularly the popular Lochgoin circuit. Periodic repairs have seen the quality of surfacing markedly improved, whilst generally low levels of vehicular traffic have enabled these improvements to be largely sustained. Elsewhere many routes are heavily trafficked, causing routes previously well suited to recreational use to become heavily degraded. Subsequent repairs, if not completed to an appropriate standard, can severely impact recreational users.



Whitelee should seek to accommodate all forms of legitimate access and activity. Many of the issues and opportunities relevant to recreational use are common across all site users. Basic visitor infrastructure such as signage, interpretation and car parking for example, benefit the overwhelming majority of users. Similarly, attractive and well-maintained entrances and facilities convey a positive and welcoming image to all visitors. The network of internal roads are, to a greater or lesser degree, suitable for a range of different activities, whilst the majority of new or upgraded routes will also be well suited to a wide range of users.

Recreational users cover a broad range of people and activities, with differing needs and expectations. These vary both across the main recreational types as well as within each of the main user groups. Whilst most developments and facilities are targeted broadly, there remains an opportunity to target specific

developments to particular users, and the recent development of MTB trails are an example of this approach. The following section considers existing use of Whitelee from the context of the main recreational uses and will help to inform management priorities for the forthcoming 5 year period.

## 7.2 WALKING

Walking remains by far the most popular activity at Whitelee, accounting for over three-quarters of recreational use and enjoyed by a wide cross-section of visitors. The activity comprises everything from short walks close to entrance points to longer and more demanding route choices.

Common with all forms of access the western area of the site, adjacent to Whitelee Visitor Centre, is the most popular gateway for visitors. Adequate car parking, signage, facilities and transport links are key drivers in the popularity of this area. The area is well signposted, with routes including the 8 mile Lochgoin circuit and Blackwood Hill viewpoint being particularly popular. The quality of routes in this area is generally good, with most routes well suited to walking as well as a wide range of other activities.

Although the Lochgoin area represents the most popular destination in terms of overall visitor numbers, other windfarm or forest entrances including Ardochrig, Carrot and High Overmuir are popular with many site users. These smaller, less formal entrances tend to draw visitors from local communities and have historically catered for informal recreation over a number of years.

Amongst walkers there is a high level of dog ownership, prompting some early management issues close to the busier visitor centre and Ardochrig entrances associated with dog fouling, and the management of dogs passing through grazing land in the west. Dog waste/litter bins were installed across the most



popular areas and are maintained by Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service. A number of dispensers for dog waste bags have also been installed, supplemented by signage and targeted information in the form of leaflets. Options for a 'Green Dog Walking' initiative are also being progressed.



In common with all site users, walkers would benefit greatly from a range of improvements, many detailed within the previous Access Plan but with implementation since delayed. A number of existing forest entrances are in a poor and degraded condition. The upgrading and formalisation of entrances, together with interpretation and signage, will significantly enhance the appeal of these areas to all users and provide more welcoming entrances than at present.

The density and relative complexity of windfarm and forest roads at Whitelee present enormous opportunities but also challenges. The complex network of routes can be extremely confusing and there remains a need to simplify navigation across the site. A signage strategy covering the windfarm, forest and external links has been agreed but is yet to be fully implemented pending a number of necessary path and safety improvements being completed.

Earlier public consultations and on-going dialogue with users have shown strong demand for circular routes of different grades from key site entrances. Walkers would also benefit from a number of additional or upgraded routes providing

access to, and in some cases through, the windfarm and improved links outwith the immediate Whitelee area towards local communities.

### 7.3 CYCLING & MTB

Cycling in various forms has been growing in popularity since the windfarm opened to the public in 2009. Previous, low level use of Whitelee Forest has been replaced by much greater use on a now expanded internal road network. Windfarm and forest roads are popular with mountain bikers and those with hybrid bikes on better surfaced routes, with cycling arguably the most effective means of exploring remoter parts of the site. In contrast to walking which has tended to develop as hot-spots close to site entrances, cyclists are more likely to make use of remote areas of the site as part of longer journeys.



Large numbers of road cyclists use the generally quiet public roads which surround Whitelee, some of which have promoted as cycle routes for many years. The A77 cycle route and B764 are popular and provide direct access to the visitor centre and western areas of the windfarm. Whitelee Visitor Centre is well equipped for cyclists with a range of facilities including showers and secure cycle storage.

There has been strong demand amongst the public for bespoke MTB facilities since the earliest public consultation in 2002. This identified such facilities as a priority for local communities, and the creation of

a network which included MTB facilities formed part of the earliest access proposals included in environmental statements linked to the windfarm development.



Early efforts to identify a suitable location took place throughout development of a draft Access Action Plan in 2008. Two main options were considered, one to develop a compact facility close to Whitelee Visitor Centre and the second to develop trails within the wider forest. Neither option received the unanimous support of landowners and project partners, as a result the draft Access Action Plan which was subject to public consultation in autumn 2008 excluded specific MTB proposals.

The omission of MTB facilities from proposals became the dominant issue raised by respondents to the 2008 public consultation. However, in the continued absence of support by relevant partners the 2009-14 access plan included no firm proposals but a renewed effort to secure a suitable site began in 2011. The development of a modest-sized facility within the former borrow-pit at Brown Hill, a site initially proposed in 2008, was again put forward as the most viable option.

Project staff worked closely with specialist trail designers Architrail, designers of the Beijing Olympic and Glasgow Commonwealth courses, to develop detailed proposals for consideration by partners. Following agreement additional funding was secured through the East Renfrewshire Leader programme and East Renfrewshire Council. This substantially reduced the impact on existing access

proposals and budgets, with costs further offset by the rationalisation of existing proposals and the removal of some marginal routes.

East Renfrewshire Council assumed control of the Brown Hill site in January 2014 under a sub-lease arrangement. Construction of the trails commenced in late January, opening to the public in June 2014. The trails are well used by the general public, catering for a wide cross section of users from beginners to more experienced riders, and increasingly by active schools, cycling clubs and other groups for coaching sessions. It successfully hosted a junior 'Dirt Crit' race in September 2014.



The extensive network of traffic free roads across the windfarm and forest, the minor roads and dedicated cycle routes which surround the site and the recent development of purpose-built MTB trails together represent a substantial and varied opportunity for cycling in its many forms. A high incidence of family groups and younger cyclists, and evidence of many lapsed cyclists rediscovering the activity are hugely encouraging. It is hoped that Whitelee can continue to play a full and active part in wider efforts to promote uptake of cycling.

## 7.4 EQUESTRIAN USE

Throughout development of the inaugural access plan a significant amount of time was spent consulting with potential user groups, not least equestrian users. This focussed on the suitability of the site,

likely levels of demand and any particular requirements, and involved consultation with individual riders, local stables and the British Horse Society.

Whilst by no means a unanimous view, many potential users unfamiliar with riding in a windfarm setting felt that such use may be limited by the potential adverse reaction of horses to wind turbines. This view was largely based on perceived problems of noise and shadow flicker associated with moving turbines.

Although equestrian activity continues to account for only a small proportion of site users overall, the site is used by a number of local stables and individual riders. Project staff have continued to work with riders to support greater use of the site, and in 2012 ran a joint initiative with the British Horse Society to host a series of horse familiarisation events. The success of these events, coupled with the overwhelmingly positive reaction of other site users to the presence of horses on site, is a hugely positive outcome which bodes well for the future.



In spite of this modest success to date, there is a long way to go if Whitelee is to attract and retain riders in more substantial numbers. Such users are more reliant than most on the availability of well surfaced tracks, free of loose surface material that can be uncomfortable and potentially cause injury. The variable quality of surfacing across the windfarm can therefore be considered a limiting factor in some areas.



To date equestrian riders have mainly accessed the windfarm via two entrances – the main site entrance adjacent to Whitelee Windfarm Visitor Centre, and Ardochrig in the east – although some use is also made of other entrances. In the case of the visitor centre entrance, the high number of other access users and often busy car parks may be considered a limiting factor, and whilst those familiar with the site continue to take access in small numbers this use is mainly confined to quieter times. For those less familiar with the site or with horses less accustomed to wind turbines, this generally busy entrance and car parks are likely to be more of a limiting factor.

Whilst formal zoning for different recreational users is considered unnecessary and largely at odds with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, clearly some areas of the site lend themselves more to particular activities. Many equestrian users for example, although welcome to use all areas of the site, are more likely to be drawn to quieter areas. A proposed car park at Ardochrig will include a number of dedicated spaces for horse boxes and trailers, with the car park providing direct entry into quieter areas of the forest.

Specific efforts will be required to ensure adjacent routes are maintained in a condition which is compatible with such use.

Currently two route options within the eastern (Ardochrig) area are promoted in the Whitelee Access Guide, with the

Lochgoin circuit in the west also promoted. An additional circuit in the northwest of the site, starting at the visitor centre and using a combination of windfarm roads and off-road surfaces in the Dunwan and Blackwood Hill areas has also been assessed as suitable for equestrian users in all but the wettest periods of the year once localised improvements have been completed. This provides a rare opportunity for riders to leave the network of surfaced windfarm roads and use more natural surfaces, these opportunities being limited by ground conditions in many areas. A similar opportunity for a partially unsurfaced circuit also exists to the northeast of Whitelee, in High Cleughearn Forest, based on a network of elevated forest rides easily accessed from the proposed Ardochrig car park.



Across the wider network of routes and internal roads many other areas are well suited to equestrian use, although poorly surfaced sections of road may limit such use in some areas. From the southwest, routes between Hareshawmuir road and Whiteleehill, Croilburn and Craigendunton all see some use by local riders and are generally well suited to such use. Recent gates installed west of Croilburn and Whiteleehill have removed blockages that previously limited such use.

As noted earlier, surface quality has a strong influence on the suitability or otherwise of routes for horse riders in particular. Whilst riders are tolerant of short sections of poorly surfaced roads within otherwise suitable routes, extensive sections of loose and large diameter surface material are unsuitable and can

cause injury and discomfort to horses. As such, partners responsible for the management of windfarm and forest roads should ensure that routes promoted or likely to be used by horses are maintained in an appropriate condition.

## 7.5 OTHER RECREATIONAL USE

Whilst walking, cycling and horse riding represent the most conspicuous forms of recreational use, Whitelee hosts a diverse range of other recreational activity. Much of this use is informal and involves small numbers of participants, while others have also been associated with larger events. These activities range from running, cross country skiing, sled dog racing and canicross, whilst orienteering and geo-caching have grown in popularity.

The site's obvious renewable energy credentials remain a significant draw for many visitors, particularly amongst organised groups and first-time visitors. Both Whitelee Visitor Centre and Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service are able to host organised visits and operate complimentary programmes to suit a wide range of audiences.



Interest in Whitelee's rich history, culture and wildlife is the primary draw for many visitors. Points of interest including Lochgoin monument and museum with their links to covenanting history, the many cairns, stones and monuments dotted across the area, and archeological interest including Dunwan Hill attract a number of visitors. Activities such as photography and bird watching are also popular.

Lochgoin reservoir which lies within the windfarm boundary, and Craigendunton and Dunwan Dam which lie immediately adjacent to it are all used for angling via lease arrangements between Scottish Water and local angling clubs. Use by watersports of all 3 reservoirs is limited, as is any obvious demand, with only infrequent use being made of Dunwan Dam for kayaking. The relatively exposed nature of these waterbodies, restricted vehicle access and the presence of many more accessible venues in the local area are likely to contribute to this apparent lack of demand.

The area has proved popular for expeditions associated with Duke of Edinburgh Award schemes. Initially expedition leaders worked closely with project staff in the planning of expeditions and camping arrangements. As organisers have become more familiar with the site they are increasingly able to work independently of project staff. Expeditions continue to pass through the site on a regular basis.

## 7.6 LARGER-SCALE EVENTS

Whitelee's potential to host larger-scale events was recognised well before the windfarm opened to the public, with a number of enquiries received prior to the site opening in late 2009. With its extensive network of largely traffic-free routes, Whitelee represents a unique setting for many larger, recreation-based events. The network of internal roads offers an almost endless variety of route options and the ability to absorb large

numbers of participants with minimal risk to site roads or the environment.

Over the period 2009-14 Whitelee has hosted a variety of events including walking, cycling, running and dog-sled racing amongst others, many for good causes. Expansion of the main visitor centre car parks in 2011, together with an agreed protocol for on-site parking for the largest of events have contributed to the site's capacity to host such events.

Although a number of successful events have been delivered, a minority have experienced postponement or cancellation due in some cases to delays associated with the approval process. This has resulted in events being re-located to other venues and others being cancelled altogether.

An events panel involving key staff and landowner representatives was established in 2010 to assess requests, with the countryside ranger service acting as a central point of contact and working closely with event organisers throughout. Central to the process was a single documentation pack aimed at providing organisers with a straightforward application process.



Although the process initially worked well it has gradually been replaced by the overlapping requirements of different organisations which it sought to avoid. Feedback from some organisers has also pointed towards a process which is seen as overly bureaucratic, with requirements appearing disproportionate to the event or activity in question.

It is worth noting that many smaller events take place on a regular basis, including charity walks involving smaller numbers and expeditions associated with Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme amongst others. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code (3.60) outlines the situations where formal approval is required, based either on the requirement for new or temporary facilities or where the nature of the event or numbers taking part is likely to cause significant interference to land management or other access users. However, with a road network of some 150km Whitelee is demonstrably more capable of absorbing large numbers of participants than many other sites.



Whitelee is a valued community asset, and where it can contribute to the hosting of events, whether for charitable causes or otherwise, it is providing an important benefit to local communities. This requires a streamlining and simplification of the request process for events and is reflected in the management priorities for 2015-19.

## **8 MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES 2015-2019**

### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

Previous sections have provided an overview of progress to date and touched on a number of the issues and opportunities for this forthcoming access

plan period. Whilst the site is already popular with visitors there are a number of actions still required, many as a result of delays which have impacted on the delivery of visitor infrastructure. The current popularity of the site in spite of some obvious shortcomings reflects the substantial potential of Whitelee. This popularity should not lead to complacency, but rather a renewed effort by partners to deliver further benefits and maximise the site's potential.

The inaugural access plan stressed the importance of basic visitor infrastructure such as key multi-user routes, improved car parking provision, new or upgraded site entrances, signage and interpretation, seating and viewpoints. The development of such facilities was to be allied with wider actions to encourage and support use of the site - including the establishment of a site-based ranger service, delivery of activities, events and environmental education, and the provision of leaflets, maps and other forms of visitor information.

Whilst the provision of new or upgraded routes was limited in overall terms, these were targeted towards gaps in provision and the need to improve connectivity across Whitelee and outwards to local communities. Delays in delivering many such improvements have allowed localised problems to remain and in some cases worsen. Provision of other infrastructure including signage has also been delayed as a result, including within Whitelee Forest which represents the largest single landholding at Whitelee. An early priority for this second 5 year period must be for outstanding legal agreements between local authorities and landowners to be concluded, allowing a backlog of physical site works to be taken forward.

In spite of these delays, the targeted improvements where landowner agreements have allowed, the substantial network of available routes, visitor centre facilities and a wide range of activity and promotion have seen the Whitelee area already attract substantial visitor numbers. However, patterns of access

are heavily skewed towards the western area of the windfarm. Whilst the good transport links and presence of the visitor centre are important drivers, nevertheless patterns of access are likely to have been further skewed by a lack of visitor facilities elsewhere. The degraded nature of many existing entrances and the often impassable nature of some historical routes including the Weavers Trail can be considered limiting factors to the development of wider recreational activity.

More comprehensive signage and the provision of maps and interpretation remains a priority, not least to simplify the complex network of internal roads for users. Improved car parking at key locations, the provision of attractive and welcoming site entrances, waymarked routes and provision of facilities such as viewpoints and seating remain as much a priority today as they did in 2009. Many such proposals are substantially unchanged from those agreed in principle with landowners at this time.

In other cases amendments have been necessary, not least to take account of the many physical changes in the period since 2009. This period has seen a large expansion of Whitelee, other windfarms developed or consented including in areas where access developments were previously proposed, and an upsurge in forestry activity which has expanded the existing network of roads.

Earlier proposals to develop a path eastwards from the Cowan's Law area in East Ayrshire have been removed pending development of the Sneddons Law windfarm development which extends across the same landholding. A number of minor routes in the Carrot, Loch Hill, Blackwood Hill and Lochgoin areas were removed with the agreement of project partners to allow the mountain biking trails to be developed at Brown Hill, with these other minor routes considered to have less overall benefit. Earlier proposals for a forest car park and associated works adjacent to Laigh Alderstocks Farm in South Lanarkshire

were removed from the plan following a stopping-up order on the public road, whilst proposals to expand access in the High Cleughearn and Dunwan areas of the site were removed following a combination of landowner resistance and likely low levels of use.

All proposals, in particular the construction or upgrading of paths, must take into account a range of factors. Challenging ground conditions dominate much of the project area, with deep peat and corresponding high water table being widespread. This limits options for unsurfaced or semi-formal routes, making pathworks technically challenging and with relatively high build cost. The use of geotextiles and durable, all-weather surfacing are the only viable solution in many areas.

During development of the inaugural access plan a large number of potential links across the Whitelee were surveyed, some previously identified with the Path Planning Study of 2002 and many entirely new. Viable routes were considered across a range of factors including technical issues, construction and maintenance cost and predicted levels of use. In many cases this demonstrated a clear rationale for a particular route to be developed, whilst in others the decision was more finely balanced. The project must also achieve best value, both in the short term and in terms of long-term maintenance obligations. Overall, the number of routes proposed in the inaugural Access Plan represented a rationalisation of those included within the earlier Path Planning Study of 2002.

Earlier proposals have remained under constant review during the period of the inaugural plan and as patterns of access and visitor demand have become more established. Through agreement with project partners a number of more marginal routes were removed to allow development of mountain biking facilities at Brown Hill, a project widely considered as delivering far reaching benefits and meeting a clear demand which existed.

The inaugural plan stated that whilst it focussed on the provision of basic visitor infrastructure and development of a more functional network, subsequent plan periods may shift the emphasis towards provision of more bespoke facilities. Progress has already been made in these areas, not least through the development of mountain biking trails and on-going actions to enhance provision for equestrian users.

The plan contained in Appendix 1 shows the proposed access network, comprising both existing routes and those where construction or upgrading work is necessary. In some cases work is required for whole or a substantial part of a route, whilst in other cases improvements are more localised to deal with issues such as poor drainage or to improve public access arrangements through the installation of gates or similar facilities. The distribution of signage, interpretation and other facilities is also shown. Entrance improvements will be widespread, focussed not only on key entrances such as Ardochrig, Carrot and High Overmuir, but all locations where routes enter the windfarm or forest area. Proposed actions comprising both physical works and other actions are summarised in 8.2.

Amongst the actions proposed is a new funding arrangement for Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service. This is currently funded by East Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire Councils, with East Renfrewshire Council acting as the employing authority. East Ayrshire Council previously funded a separate ranger, based at Dean Castle Country Park, between 2009-2013.

The existing site-based ranger service covers the entire Whitelee area, regardless of local authority boundaries, responding to issues across the network and delivering events and activities widely. The service also provides environmental education to visiting schools and other groups from all 3 local authority areas and beyond, and a substantial number of those taking part in

Stroller Striders or other activities are drawn from the East Ayrshire Council area. Increasing demands associated with higher visitor numbers, schools visits, an expanding events programme and increasing access infrastructure are placing greater demand on staff resources.

In order to meet this additional demand it is proposed that the current structure of 2 FTE staff is increased to 2.5FTE through the introduction of a seasonal ranger between the months of March-September. It is further proposed that the costs of the ranger service be split pro-rata between all 3 local authorities. This will provide a more robust service going forward, better able to meet the increasing demands placed upon it, and increase the site presence beyond that which can be achieved with only 2 full-time staff.

Access to toilet facilities is another key management issue, affecting the visiting public and site-based staff alike and has been consistently raised by site users and project partners. Currently access to toilets is tied to Whitelee Windfarm Visitor Centre opening hours, resulting in no access to toilet facilities in early mornings, evenings or throughout much of the winter period. As electronic counters have consistently demonstrated, the site remains popular to recreational users throughout the year with the new year period being amongst the busiest times of the year.

The issue is likely to become more acute as visitor numbers associated with the recently completed MTB facility grows. Feedback from users of the facility has been overwhelmingly positive, with one of the most commonly stated benefits being their proximity to population centres allowing for use after the school or working day. Hence, the current absence of toilet facilities during evenings throughout the year and the winter period is an issue that is likely to worsen.

Concerns regarding building security and potential vandalism have prevented externally accessed toilets at Whitelee



Visitor Centre from being made available out-of-hours. East Renfrewshire Council is actively looking at options to provide a permanent facility as a long-term solution. However, the relatively high development costs, absence of mains services and requirements for landowner and site operator leases make this a longer term proposition.

As an interim solution it is proposed that temporary facilities be made available for use by the public and project staff. In the short term it is proposed to site a temporary facility adjacent to the main car parks. This could be retained beyond the winter months to provide facilities during evenings throughout the year until a permanent solution is found.

A second toilet facility is required within ground already leased to East Renfrewshire Council at Brown Hill, for use by users of the MTB facility or general site users using popular recreational routes (Lochgoin Circuit, Blackwood Hill viewpoint walk) which pass the site. Options for both temporary and permanent toilet facilities are amongst a number of developments specific to the East Renfrewshire area which it is hoped can be taken forward separately by East Renfrewshire Council over the 2015-2019 period.

## 8.2 Summary of aims and actions

### 1. Improve access provision across Whitelee area through targeted upgrading or construction of paths:

Conclude path agreements between local authorities and landowners to enable physical site improvements to be taken forward.

Upgrade Weavers Trail between High Overmuir and Myres Hill to provide a surfaced, all-weather route.

Provide new link and re-align route to west of Myres Hill to improve privacy of residents.

Upgrade historic right of way between Carrot and Eaglesham, to include construction of a new bridge south of Park Farm.

Provide new footpath within roadside field at Carrot to improve access and visitor safety.

Construct footpath northwards from Laigh Hapton Farm, following part of former right of way to Whiteleehill.

Extend route between Hareshawmuir and Craigendunton reservoir to provide a new link north of Craigendunton reservoir to Lochgoin Farm.

Completion of path link to west of Lochgoin reservoir.

Localised upgrading of right of way between Greenfields Farm and Blackwood Hill.

Upgrading of informal route between Carrot and Dickman's Glen, with localised drainage & surface improvements.

Target localised upgrading on other routes to improve recreational access and remove blockages.

### 2. Improve provision of car parking at key locations

Develop new car park at Pogiven Bridge to the south of High Overmuir, with space for 8-10 cars.

Develop new forest car park at Ardochrig with space for ~30 vehicles including dedicated spaces for horse boxes/trailers.

Monitor existing, informal car parking arrangements at other locations including Carrot and Hareshawmuir.

### **3. Upgrade site entrances to provide welcoming and high-quality entrances into windfarm and forest**

Improvement to forest entrances at Ardochrig and Carrot, with new entrance detail including walling, planting and landscaping work.

Upgrade all windfarm or forest entrances through improved entrances, signage and landscaping improvements.

### **4. Improve provision for equestrian users**

Provide dedicated spaces for horse boxes/trailers within Ardochrig car park development.

Develop off-road equestrian routes within Dunwan Hill and High Cleughearn areas.

Manage existing, promoted routes in Ardochrig and Lochgoin areas and ensure routes are maintained in suitable condition.

Install equestrian mounting/dismounting blocks adjacent to gates on popular routes.

Explore opportunities for additional routes well-suited to equestrian use and promote accordingly.

Continue to liaise with equestrian users and representative bodies to ensure developments meet needs of users and continue to be well used.

Continue to inspect all routes popular with equestrian users and report any problems to relevant partners responsible for management.

### **5. Provide signage and interpretation to inform visitors and simplify navigation**

Improved signage and installation of maps/ interpretation at Ardochrig, Carrot, High Overmuir and other site entrances.

Implement agreed signage strategy to expand coverage across Whitelee.

Install maps and interpretation at key junctions across network.

Develop waymarked, circular routes from key entrances including Ardochrig and Carrot.

### **6. Develop additional viewpoints at key locations to enhance visitor experience**

Develop new viewpoints at Corse Hill and Ardochrig Hill.

### **7. Expand provision of seating on popular routes**

Install additional seating at key points across network, making best use of natural vantage points.

### **8. Gather quantitative and qualitative visitor information to better inform site management**

Install additional visitor and vehicle counters at site entrances.

Undertake additional surveys to more provide qualitative visitor information

### **9. Inspection and maintenance of access infrastructure**

Inspect and maintain all routes and facilities implemented by Access Project in line with local authority obligations and landowner agreements.

Agree minimum standards for windfarm and forest roads and report deficiencies.

Identify and programme preventative maintenance work.

### **10. Provide access to toilets and washing facilities outwith visitor centre opening hours**

Provide temporary toilet facilities at 2 locations.

Investigate options for a permanent toilet facility.

### **11. Continue to develop cycling activity and seek to increase overall numbers participating in activity**

Continue to promote Whitelee for cycling and work actively with cycling groups and representative bodies to further develop cycling activity at Whitelee.

Work collaboratively with external agencies to promote Whitelee alongside other regional facilities.

Inspect and maintain Brown Hill MTB trails to ensure all trails and associated features are maintained in prescribed grade.

Work with partners and external agencies to host further mountain biking events at Brown Hill site

Seek to increase use of Brown Hill trails amongst outdoor education practitioners including Active Schools.

Develop promotional video to showcase MTB and wider cycling opportunities at Whitelee.

### **12. Provide structured events and activities for visitors**

Continue to support WCRS staff in all areas of activity including events, Stroller Striders, environmental education, biological monitoring and provision of volunteering opportunities.

Continue to develop and diversify annual events programme

### **13. Increase capacity of Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service**

Expand ranger service staffing through employment of a seasonal ranger during spring/summer.

Secure contributions from both South Lanarkshire and East Ayrshire Councils in respect of ranger service expenditure.

### **14. Provide environmental education activity and volunteering opportunities**

Enhance environmental education provision through creation of boardwalks and dipping platforms and expanded pond network adjacent to visitor centre car parks.

Develop dedicated shelter for use by visiting groups during environmental education activities.

### **15. Support delivery of larger events**

Seek to simplify and streamline events process and remove small to modestly sized events from permissions process altogether.

Liaise with project partners and prospective event organisers to encourage greater use of Whitelee for organised events.

Encourage greater use of Whitelee for adventure/outdoor education

### **16. Promote Whitelee to wide range of users and seek to further increase visitor numbers**

Continue to publicise and promote Whitelee across a range of traditional and new media.

Provide maps, leaflets and tailored guides for use by visitors

Maintain and develop existing links with user groups and representative bodies.

### 8.3 INCOME & EXPENDITURE (2015-2019)

The updated Access Plan includes a range of physical site works previously proposed within the 2009-14 period but with implementation delayed. In many cases these proposals are carried forward into this second plan period, although as part of the review that has taken place the overall number of routes has been reduced. This takes account of patterns of demand that have since developed, the impact of windfarm and other developments on earlier proposals and other changes over the period of the 2009-14 plan.

It is proposed that the majority of project costs continue to be shared pro-rata between the 3 local authorities in order to develop the robust, high-quality visitor infrastructure that will benefit communities on all sides.

Projected expenditure from 2015-19 is £585,598 excluding ranger service costs, or £971,086 with ranger service costs included. It is proposed that from 2015/16 the existing site-based ranger service is expanded to include a seasonal post, increasing capacity in line with growing demands. It has also been proposed that since the ranger service already covers the entire Whitelee area and provides services to visitors from each of the 3 local authority areas and beyond, that costs are shared pro-rata between all three local authorities. The budget in Appendix 3 is presented on this basis.

In line with earlier partner agreements, each local authority will be responsible for the maintenance of access infrastructure within their respective area. These costs will be heavily influenced by landowner agreements yet to be finalised as well as the exact arrangements for meeting

maintenance obligations in each case. East Renfrewshire Council is likely to incur the highest maintenance costs, not least given its responsibilities for the Brown Hill MTB facility which was developed on land formally leased to the Council. Given the nature of the facility, increasing levels of use and the need to maintain all sections of trail in the appropriate grade, maintenance will be more intensive than is the case for other access infrastructure.

Since each local authority is likely to use a different approach to meeting their long-term maintenance obligations – using existing staff resources, third party contractors or a combination of these approaches - maintenance costs are not specifically detailed within the budget presented in Appendix 3 given the uncertainties of estimating costs under such circumstances.

Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service undertake a substantial level of day-to-day maintenance and will continue to do so, but as the network of access infrastructure grows an increasing proportion of maintenance activity will require to be undertaken by other means. Each local authority will require to ensure that on-going maintenance obligations are adequately resourced. It should be noted that future developer contributions make provision for such costs to be met on an on-going basis, with the level of developer contributions set at a level to account for these long-term liabilities.

During the 2009-14 period, the development of mountain biking trails at Brown Hill in East Renfrewshire saw a departure from previous arrangements whereby all implementation costs were split on an established pro-rata basis. Although it was clear this new facility would attract visitors from each local authority area and beyond, it was nevertheless recognised that the addition of this substantial project within East Renfrewshire could not be accommodated within existing project budgets without either increased contributions from partners or the removal of a more substantial number of existing proposals.

To reduce the impact on existing budgets and ensure this important project could progress East Renfrewshire Council provided additional funding from existing allocations being made to the access project.

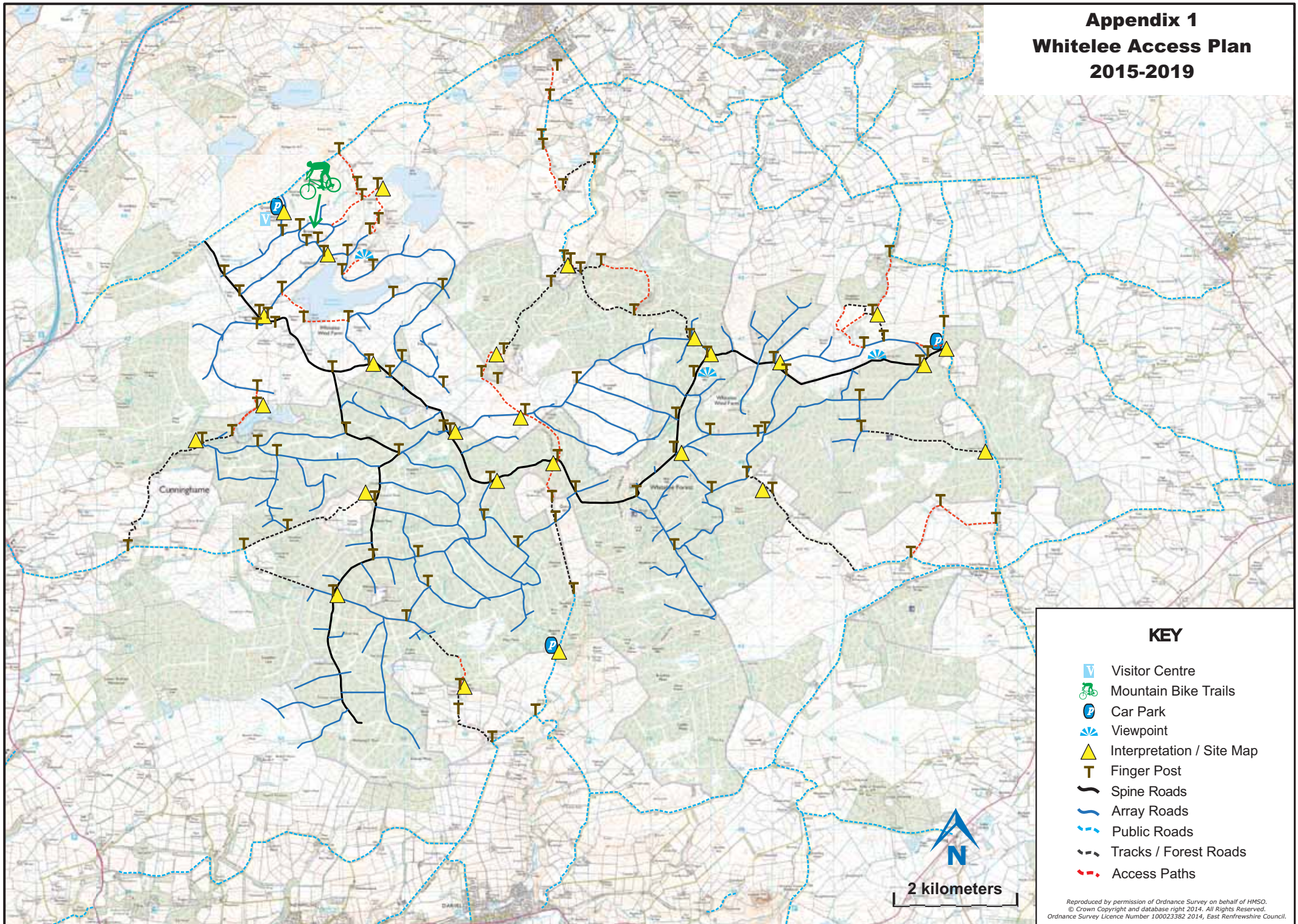
During 2015-19 there are a number of additional projects which East Renfrewshire Council propose to implement, over and above the main access proposals included within the main project budget in Appendix 3. These include the provision of temporary toilets at both the Brown Hill MTB facility and visitor centre car parks, and the provision of a permanent toilet facility in the longer term.

It is also proposed that current facilities for environmental education be improved to include the expansion of the current pond system close to Whitelee visitor centre and the installation of boardwalks and dipping platforms, as well as the creation of a permanent shelter for visiting school groups taking part in environmental education activities. Taken together, these will significantly expand opportunities for such activity within the East Renfrewshire area.

East Renfrewshire Council also intend to produce a promotional video to showcase cycling opportunities with a particular focus on the recently completed MTB facilities, and to expand active recreation and events across a range of East Renfrewshire facilities including Whitelee, working closely with local schools and other groups. These proposals, estimated to cost in the region of £170,000 over the period to 2019, are not included within the main project budget in Appendix 3 but will be taken forward separately and funded from earlier underspends and future project allocations. These developments will benefit future promotion and activity within the East Renfrewshire Council area.

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# Appendix 1 Whitelee Access Plan 2015-2019



## KEY

- Visitor Centre
- Mountain Bike Trails
- Car Park
- Viewpoint
- Interpretation / Site Map
- Finger Post
- Spine Roads
- Array Roads
- Public Roads
- Tracks / Forest Roads
- Access Paths

**APPENDIX 2  
INCOME & EXPENDITURE 2009-2014**

<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	
								(to 31.12.14)	
Staff Costs	8,049	36,370	41,937	42,835	43,021	43,981	43,467	31,618	<b>291,278</b>
Transport Costs	472	1,269	1,074	897	660	566	697	665	<b>6,300</b>
Accomodation/Services	0	443	919	722	1,981	2,698	4,057	1,535	<b>12,355</b>
Tools/Equipment	0	1,048	103	630	256	367	538	0	<b>2,942</b>
Site Works	0	0	22,263	54,748	1,388	39,987	94,602	167,560	<b>380,548</b>
Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service			7,992	89,356	75,429	73,319	74,316	57,692	<b>378,104</b>
<b>sub-total</b>	<b>8,521</b>	<b>39,130</b>	<b>74,288</b>	<b>189,188</b>	<b>122,735</b>	<b>160,918</b>	<b>217,677</b>	<b>259,070</b>	<b>1,071,527</b>
<b>INCOME</b>									
ERC (windfarm fund/access project)	4,592	18,702	34,583	59,573	17,985	47,272	109,491	84,774	<b>376,972</b>
ERC (planning cont - MTB project)								9,767	<b>9,767</b>
ERC (windfarm fund/WCRS)			5,115	57,188	48,275	46,924	47,562	36,923	<b>241,987</b>
SLC	2,417	12,806	19,880	25,282	18,381	25,280	21,232	38,764	<b>164,042</b>
SLC (WCRS)			2,877	32,168	27,154	26,395	26,754	20,769	<b>136,117</b>
EAC	1,511	7,622	11,833	14,977	10,941	15,047	12,638	23,073	<b>97,642</b>
ER LEADER PROJECT								45,000	<b>45,000</b>
<b>sub-total</b>	<b>8,520</b>	<b>39,130</b>	<b>74,288</b>	<b>189,188</b>	<b>122,736</b>	<b>160,918</b>	<b>217,677</b>	<b>259,070</b>	<b>1,071,527</b>



**APPENDIX 3  
2015-2019 BUDGET**

<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	
	(01.01.15-31.03.15)					
Staff Costs	12501	44780	45452	46134	46826	<b>195693</b>
Transport Costs	140	817	829	841	854	<b>3481</b>
Accomodation/Services	1377	2955	3000	3045	3090	<b>13467</b>
Tools/Equipment	420	426	432	439	445	<b>2162</b>
Site Works	27735	141375	201685	0	0	<b>370795</b>
Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service	17307	90000	91350	92720	94111	<b>385488</b>
<b>sub-total</b>	<b>59480</b>	<b>280353</b>	<b>342748</b>	<b>143179</b>	<b>145326</b>	<b>971086</b>
<b>INCOME</b>						
ERC (windfarm fund/access project)	21990	99255	131086	26311	26705	<b>305347</b>
ERC (windfarm fund/WCRS)	11076	46929	47633	48347	49072	<b>203057</b>
SLC	12652	57106	75419	15138	15365	<b>175680</b>
SLC (WCRS)	6231	27000	27405	27816	28233	<b>116685</b>
EAC	7531	33992	44893	9011	9146	<b>104573</b>
EAC (WCRS)		16071	16313	16557	16806	<b>65747</b>
<b>sub-total</b>	<b>59480</b>	<b>280353</b>	<b>342749</b>	<b>143180</b>	<b>145327</b>	<b>971089</b>

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इस सूचना-पत्र मे उल्लेखित सूचना यदि आप हिन्दी अनुवाद मे चाहे तो कृपया सम्पर्क करे ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਲੀਫਲੈਟ ਵਿਚ ਦਿਤੀ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਦਾ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਇਥੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

اگر آپ اس لیفلیٹ میں درج معلومات کا ترجمہ اپنی زبان میں چاہتے ہیں تو ہم سے رابطہ کریں

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