

The Pentland Hills Regional Park (PHRP) contains 11 reservoirs, around 10,000 hectares of countryside and 100km of waymarked paths. It is located next to Edinburgh and other large urban settlement areas. During 2020/21 and the Covid-19 pandemic, the area drew many visitors who were looking to exercise or escape to the countryside when they could not travel abroad.



The Regional Park is home to around 30 households, several fisheries and numerous businesses which contribute to the Scottish economy and actively help manage a protected landscape which contains a rich mosaic of farmed land, heather moorland, reservoirs, woodland and hills. It is regularly used by walkers, runners, cyclists, horse-riders and others utilising the open spaces for their physical and mental health. The last survey conducted in 2005/06 estimated 600,000+ annual visitors to the Park.

The Regional Park spans three local authority boundaries (City of Edinburgh Council, Midlothian and West Lothian), and is managed by the City of Edinburgh Council employed PHRP team, made up of a Regional Park manager (vacant post), a part-time Senior Officer, 3.5 FT Natural Heritage Officers, supplemented by the City of Edinburgh Council Natural Heritage Officers to deliver minimum service cover at weekends.

The PHRP service is affected by local authority budget pressures and has been impacted over the years in terms of staff resource and operational budget at a time when popularity for outdoor access has been increasing annually. The recent pandemic has shone the spotlight on the Pentland Hills Regional Park as being a visitor-impact hot spot at national level.

1/ A Welcoming Place

In November 2020 PHRP ran <u>a public engagement exercise</u> **looking at issues around antisocial behaviour and parking, and how these could be solved.** This exercise was filled out online by **1,872 respondents**, with several further separate submissions coming in different formats from organisations. Percentages below do not include these separate submissions. Questions were asked along four main themes: parking / path access facilities, camping facilities, provision of toilet facilities and charging for car parking. The results of the exercise were discussed at the PHRP joint committee, where papers were produced for perusal by elected members and the public in the context of two applications to VisitScotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF).

66% of the respondents supported the introduction of car parking charges with an overwhelming majority (90%) feeling that money raised from car park charges should be retained by the Regional Park for infrastructure such as car park and path improvements. 40 % of the respondents also said they would be happy to pay a 50p fee to access public toilets in the Regional Park.



The PHRP team worked closely with Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust (ELGT) and secured £15,900 funding from NatureScot Better Recover Fund round 1 to produce the first PHRP Visitor Plan.

To help deliver a pertinent document, the PHRP Visitor

Management Action Group was created to draw up a VM Action table. The working group is made of key representatives from fishery/land managers, Police Scotland from the three Local authority areas, Fire & Rescue Service, Ministry of Defence, Scottish Water, Friends of the Pentlands and key Volunteer groups. It offers a useful and regular communication platform between all these partners and is able to provide reassurance and deliver targeted action when resource allows it.

A draft version of the PHRP Visitor Management plan has been submitted for the purpose of the 2022/23 Green Flag award assessment.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Harlaw house has not been opened to visitors but has been used as a welfare facility for our front-line staff.

2/ Healthy, Safe and Secure

2.1 The return of the Pentland Hills Ranger Service

Following funding pressure, the Pentland Hills Ranger Service merged with the City of Edinburgh Council Countryside Ranger Service in 2012 to become the Forestry & Natural Heritage team. Rangers became "Natural Heritage Officers," focusing on asset management, fundraising and project management. The team struggled to deliver sufficient on-the-ground cover to engage with increasing numbers of visitors and deal with negative impacts from irresponsible access takers.

In 2021, a successful bid of £64k from NatureScot's Better Places Green Recovery Fund allowed for the employment of six Seasonal Park Rangers (two of them were formerly PHRP Volunteer Rangers) from mid-July until end of October. They have been working in pairs and engaging with visitors on how to enjoy the hills safely. They provided a much-needed "boots on the ground" presence to support the Pentland Hills land- and fishery-managers during the busy season. Working in shifts, they have been able to open the temporary toilet facilities earlier in the morning almost every day and interact with visitors at our hot spots between 7am until 10pm on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.



There was a focus on the design of the new uniform and branding of vehicles to increase public awareness of their presence on site.

The Regional Park has always been popular with people wild camping and has always suffered from "dirty camping", but in 2020 the problem became indefensible. However, last year with the Seasonal Rangers able to engage with campers as they arrive and before they left about how to camp responsibly, the problem has been reduced to a handful of cases.

The Rangers have been provided with a wide variety of training and have been given opportunities to gain experience supervising Volunteer Rangers and manage groups delivering a practical conservation task. The Rangers also worked on a variety of projects which include an experiment on nudging dog owners behaviour with regards to picking up after their dogs; creation of a blog or Facebook posts from one of the Ranger's dog's perspective which promoted SOAC and issues encountered in the hills; a management plan for a newly acquired area at Bonaly Country Park and finally our Rangers prepared and delivered their first guided walks back in October.

2.2 Maintaining safe and welcoming outdoor access

With many visitors being new to the Regional Park over the last year, the Seasonal Rangers made a point of informing the public of how to enjoy the area safely. How to be prepared for the changeable weather, rough ground and the precautions that can be taken to avoid accidents while on or in the water.

Another NatureScot's Better Places Green Recovery Funding worth £30k was successful to employ 4 Seasonal Estate workers to deliver a quicker response linked with visitor management such as camping, fires and associated debris and litter in the PHRP and Edinburgh parks & Greenspaces. There is also the maintenance of fences, styles and other park furniture which are under more pressure than usual. There has been a marked increase in the creation of unauthorised mountain bike trails which need managed for safety. The estate team have



been available during the busiest periods to visit the areas most affected by these issues to keep them clean and safe.

The City of Edinburgh Council Parks & Greenspace has also signed up to the Government "Kickstart scheme" and recruited 3 young people back in September 2021, one of which has been placed with the PHRP and Estate teams. More recently, other candidates are being signed up in 2022 for Park Ranger positions as part of the "No one left behind" employability scheme.

2.3 Prevention and education

During Easter 2021, the Midlothian Partnership Against Rural Crime (MPARC), ran a Rural and Acquisitive Crime Initiative. You can watch a video produced with all these partners (March 2021). On the Edinburgh side of the hills, the South West Edinburgh Police team ran two operations: Operation Harefield with Officers engaging with dog walkers and providing educational leaflets / information about livestock attack during weekends, and Anti-Social Behaviour Patrols where a mix of uniform and plain-clothes officers carried out patrols in the afternoons and evenings at reservoir car-parks and camping hotspots. The West Lothian Police team has now also set up a Partnership Against Rural Crime and we look forward to working closely with them in the future.



During summer 2021, the

Edinburgh South West

Community Policing Team
repeated Operation Boxy. This
first took place in the summer of
2020 following an increase in
disorder, violence and general
antisocial behaviour in the
PHRP. Working closely with

partners in the PHRP team, water bailiffs, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Friends of the Pentlands and local landowners, the aim was to **Prevent, Educate and Enforce. Midlothian Police Community Officers** have also been carrying out rural crime patrols using resources such as quad bikes, 4 x4s and

foot patrols. Various locations were covered, including Capelaw Hill, Castlelaw Ranges, Flotterstone Glen, and Glencorse and Loganlea reservoirs.

Last summer, there was a particular emphasis on water safety, the need for this being sadly confirmed when a tragic incident saw the death of a man in Threipmuir reservoir in July 2021. In our efforts to highlight water safety, events were held at Flotterstone with PHRP officers assisting Midlothian Police Scotland officers and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) at Glencorse

reservoir. Two other events were also held on the Edinburgh side of the hills at Harlaw/
Threipmuir in partnership with the Edinburgh South West
Community Police team, Water
Bailiffs, SFRS, Friends of the
Pentlands and local landowners.



We also improved our relationship with Police Scotland across all three council areas the PHRP covers. We identified key officers for each area, produced weekend briefing notes detailing what our officers dealt with during the week, and flagged any potential issues for the weekend to coordinate resources as best as possible across the different services. We had access to phone numbers to Police officers on duty in some instances; this proved useful on occasions when a 101-response call was not being followed up.

2.4 Access to reservoir

Scottish Water (SW) is investigating ways to support responsible access through its **Enabling Responsible Access pilot.**

As part of this, the SW owned Pentland Hills reservoirs were visited by Scottish Water to identify some



of the ongoing issues as a result of increased visitor numbers.

While SW will look at ways to improve signage and consider ways to improve user unity, they will also be promoting water safety and responsible access as fundamental campaigns to encourage safe and responsible access to the Pentland Hills and beyond.

Some of these initiatives may also be adopted by the City of Edinburgh Council at their reservoirs if they prove effective.

In June 2021, we promoted on Facebook the Drowning prevention campaign from Scottish Water.

2.5 Trying new ideas

Midlothian Police Community Policy Team were recently reported to be the first Police Scotland officers to carry Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs) on quad bikes. Over the summer period, quad bike officers attended a number of emergency calls in the Pentland Hills related to collapsed fell runners. It is hoped that quad bike officers carrying AEDs will help to save lives.

As part of a cohort led by National Trust, the PHRP team signed up to carry out a trial on "nudging behaviour" of dog owners visiting one of the Regional Park hot spots. Rangers explored how different tools (eg: spray paint, posters, social media etc) could be used to make a



difference on how people pick up after their dogs when visiting the hills. Another experiment was set to explore how an audience react to SOAC or issues in the hills being promoted by a "Ranger dog" via social media or a blog.

3/ Well Maintained and Clean

3.1 Taking stock of existing infrastructures

Many of the 18 car parks in the Regional Park were originally created to alleviate local problems which occurred when inconsiderate parking blocked farm and residential access. However, ever-increasing access to the hills by motor vehicles means that these car parks are regularly reaching capacity, resulting in significant vehicle displacement at the most popular sites. This is detrimental to relationships with adjacent farmers and land managers, and undermines the effectiveness of parking provision.

Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) will see an extra 140 car parking spaces created (including more for blue badge holders), and electric vehicle charging points installed, in the four main car parks at Harlaw, Threipmuir, Bonaly and Flotterstone - by March 2023. Cyclists will also benefit with additional bike stands, and public bike pump and repair stations. It has proven to be a challenge for the PHRP team to deliver this complex funding bid project within the timescale given, when all the Local Authority Planning departments have been impacted by the pandemic (slowed down by case officers being off sick, or overwhelmed by the number of planning applications they received).

See the proposed designs for the 4 car parks in Appendix 1.



One of the more unpleasant issues our officers had to deal with during summer 2020 was large amounts of used toilet paper and human waste at locations such as Harlaw, Threipmuir and Bonaly Country Park.

Our team has worked closely with the City of Edinburgh Council Communications team to produce two animations about outdoor toileting: "Foul Facts" and "Steps to Responsible Outdoor Toileting" which you can see/share on the Council's <u>youtube channel</u>. Find out more about the <u>PHRP campaign</u> on our website.

As a result of this, the PHRP team applied to two funds: £71k from NatureScot's Better Places Green Recovery Fund and £75k from Visit Scotland's RTIF.



The former was for emergency portaloo toilet provision during summer 2021 (from June to end of October) at the above key locations, and extra cleaning at Flotterstone public toilets, and the latter was for permanent toilet provision at the same locations.

The temporary toilets have proved a hit with visitors, with lots of comments on their cleanliness: a dedicated team cleans them throughout the day to minimise risk of Covid-19 transmission. We have noticed a reduction in toilet litter at all three sites. Through this funding the Flotterstone

toilets are now open seven days a week and are cleaned regularly through the day. A revised cost of this project is £34,300, with savings being made due to a late award / start time, and staff not being required to queue-manage.

We look forward to building permanent facilities at Harlaw, Threipmuir and Bonaly through the RTIF in 2022/23.

3.2 Traffic management measures

Following informal discussions with stakeholders and other interested representatives, several actions

have been proposed that, collectively, would enable a strategic approach to safer and more sustainable access to the Regional Park for visitors, and also reduce the incidence of irresponsible parking occurring at principal access and beauty spots. A Feasibility Study has been commissioned to consider options available to address inconsiderate parking around PHRP car parks.

Two new Clearways were introduced since December 2020 as a result of cars parking dangerously during the pandemic.



A funding bid of £44k to NatureScot's Better Places Green Recovery Fund to employ 5 seasonal car park marshalls and a supervisor to assist with traffic management at hot spots over Summer 2021 was unsuccessful.

4/ Environmental Management

4.1 Creating sustainable active travel routes to the hills

The Scottish Government has made available funding from the RTIF as part of its Covid-19 recovery plan. The purpose of this funding is to support the development of a minimum of six pilot strategic tourism infrastructure development plans for certain priority areas identified by the Infrastructure & Investment Subgroup of the Visitor Management Steering Group. £31,500 funding from Visit Scotland has been secured to engage Edinburgh & Lothian Greenspace Trust (ELGT) to produce a Strategic Plan specifically to enhance the quality and improve the connectivity / functionality of routes and links into the Regional Park.

The Strategic Plan will be completed early 2022. It will highlight key improvements required for each pressure point, explore the creation of safer pathways for all users on these routes and how they can be promoted.

There are four priority visitor ingress routes leading to the Regional Park. Each location is Category 5 (Accessible Rural) in the Scottish Government's six-fold Urban Rural Classification categories:

- Penicuik to Flotterstone
- Bonaly to Bonaly Country Park
- Currie/Balerno to Harlaw
- Balerno to Threipmuir



4.2 Electric vehicles

As part of the Edinburgh's climate target to be net-zero by 2030, the PHRP team have operated the Ranger Service with **a fleet of electric vehicles** to supplement existing two 4x4 vehicles. The experiment was a success, with Rangers able to make full use of the long-range capacity of these new vehicles and fast-charging points during their shifts to get to locations around the Regional Park.

4.3 Litter management

We continue to develop our messages to our visitors and raise awareness of the impact of irresponsible access to a living and working landscape.





Stickers used on our litter bins

Several litter picking groups have been actively involved and supporting the PHRP team in tackling irresponsible littering in the hills.

5/ Landscape and Heritage

The Pentland Hills Regional Park is a living, changing environment and has evolved as a mixed land use resource which is an important leisure, economic, community and heritage asset to the capital city and the surrounding Lothians.

With this evolution comes increasing and changing pressures and demands on the Pentland Hills Regional Park management and the other key stakeholders seeking to balance recreation and enjoyment with economic demands and the conservation of the Pentland Hills Regional Park's natural and built heritage assets.

Please refer to the PHRP Strategic Management plan (Draft) 2019-2028.

This document is still requiring some changes to reflect on the impact of the recent pandemic and the aspiration for the Regional Park's role on the delivery of a **Climate emergency/Nature Restoration** plan which are yet to be created with our partners (in the 2022-23 workplan).

A **Pentland Path Project Plan was produced in 2016 and needs to be revised** to understand how to best progress the much needed refurbishment of the 100km path network in the hills, in the light of the introduction of a sustainable source of revenue from the car park charging proposal and following on the creation of the Pentland Land Managers Association (PLMA) who are actively seeking funding for the improvement of these infrastructures, along with the Friends of the Pentland Hills (see points 6.1 and 6.2).

6/ Community Involvement

6.1 Friends of the Pentland

<u>The Friends of the Pentland Hills</u> are a very active environmental charity organisation dedicated to conserving, protecting and enhancing the Pentland Hills. They "aim to promote the natural beauty and diversity of the hills, their cultural heritage, the quality of life of those who live and work there, and the enjoyment of recreational visitors."

They deliver a wide range of activities such as litter picking, practical conservation tasks like tree planting or path repair, they organise guided walks and lead on some waymarking projects and the promotion of the Pentland Way.

They have volunteers maintaining the Harlaw wildlife garden and the group is now looking at significant partnership working with the PHRP team and other key partners to fund raise for a comprehensive action plan for the repair of the 100km path network in the hills.

6.2 Fishery and Land managers

As explained in the introduction, the Regional Park is home to around 30 households, several fisheries and numerous businesses which contribute to the Scottish economy and actively help manage a protected landscape which contains a rich mosaic of farmed land, heather moorland, reservoirs, woodland and hills.

We have over the years cultivated excellent working partnership and relationship with private landowners, farmers, game keepers, Ministry of Defense and fishery managers to assist with visitor management, events organisation and coordination especially when they require access permission from multiple landowners, and project deliveries.

The Pentland Land Managers Association (PLMA) was formed in November 2020 in response to the growing number of issues facing farmers and land managers in and around the Pentland Hills Regional Park. The PLMA is effectively a community initiative seeking to represent the views of its members and to support the stated aims of the Regional Park when it was set up, which are:

- 1. To retain the essential character of the hills as a place for the peaceful enjoyment of the countryside;
- 2. Caring for the hills, so that the landscape and the habitat is protected and enhanced;
- 3. Within this caring framework, to encourage responsible public enjoyment of the hills in accordance with the statutory powers and duties of the three Councils and having regard in particular to the requirements of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003;
- 4. Co-ordination of these aims so that they co-exist with farming and other land uses within the Park.

In the short time since forming they already have membership representing 12 landholdings, which cover over 80% of the Park area. Following extensive discussions with Councillors, the Park authorities and local politicians the PLMA has recently been granted a voting seat on the Joint Committee that oversees the operation of the Park.

For further information about the PLMA and for updates on various projects please visit their website: https://pentlandmanagers.org

6.3 Pentland Hills Volunteer Ranger Service



We are very proud of our **Pentland Hills Voluntary Ranger (VR) Service**. It was the first volunteer ranger service set up in Scotland and many other organisations, such as Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park have asked us for advice on setting up their volunteers.

The main duty for our VRs is to support the PHRP duty officer at the weekend and carry out patrols to engage the public and give advice on responsible access. They also let us know about the state of path infrastructure and wildlife sightings. It is important our VRs are knowledgeable about the Park and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. They are recruited through an application form and interview and then

trained over at least five days to gain the information they need.

At present we have 23 active VRs: last year they did 97 days of patrolling for us.

6.4 Wider involvement

The Governance of the Regional Park is complex and allows for a wide range of stakeholders to take part in the shaping of the future of this special protected area.

The decision making sits with the <u>PHRP Joint Committee</u> which meets twice a year and the advisory element comes from the <u>PHRP Consultative forum</u> which meets once to twice a year.

7/ Marketing and Communication

During the pandemic, the PHRP team invested a lot of effort in reaching out to our visitors, some of them coming to the hills for the first time and not aware of SOAC or how to prepare their visit or stay safe. The official website was freshened up with a downloadable visitor guide / map, and linked VisitScotland video on how to make the most of a considerate visit to the Regional Park during the

pandemic. We also included information on winter safety (covering topics such as avalanches and ice on reservoirs), and information on camping / fires and recreation / sports on reservoirs for summer.

The "Pentland Beacon" was re-launched as a monthly enewsletter targeting fisheries, land managers / landowners, local residents, councillors, MSPs, local businesses linked with PHRP, Police Scotland, Council officers etc across the three Local Authorities. It keeps everyone informed of our progress and details upcoming plans and offers a platform for police teams to share what they have done. Our communication with the general public and our visitors was delivered separately via our website and Facebook platform.



8/ Looking into the future

8.1 Income generation

<u>The PHRP Donation Scheme</u> is a simple way for people to put something back into the Regional Park. The scheme creates a way for a general donation to be made towards environmental improvements in the Park. All funds raised are used only for new 'added value' projects on the ground and not for the day-to-day running of the Service.

To secure a more sustainable source of revenue, the PHRP is now working on the **introduction of car parking charges** at the 4 principal car parks, following the results of the 2020 Public Engagement. There will also be the introduction of a fee to use the future permanent toilet facilities which will be installed in 2022/23.

The income raised would be ringfenced for the maintenance and improvement of PHRP infrastructures.

This would follow an investment in the improvement of the 4 principal car parks in 2022-23 following a grant funding from RTIF as mentioned in 3.1, and the implementation of traffic management measures to prevent displacement parking on access roads (see 3.2), along with the creation on new sustainable active travel routes to hot spots (see point 4.1).

8.2 Ranger Service



The return of the Park Rangers patrolling the hills and engaging with our visitors has been a resounding success last summer. When they were still in post, we received a lot of positive feedback and support for the Rangers to be made permanent staff within the PHRP team, a reflection of the level of dedication and enthusiasm those individuals have showcased in such a short period of time. Most of them had never been a Ranger but they all had decided to pursue this career path with passion. They had embraced all the challenges associated with irresponsible access and shared with

visitors their love of the outdoors and the Regional Park.

Their presence last summer has also been a moral boost for the existing PHRP staff who had to deal with the initial 2020 pandemic. As the winter visitor season is well underway, the PHRP team is focussing on how to best engage with the public following the issues encountered the previous year: increase in livestock attacks as a result of a sharp rise in people getting a dog (a large number becoming first time dog owner), risk linked with people walking (or even cycling) on iced reservoirs, avalanche incidents and car parking displacement on access roads impacting the rural community and emergency services. The proximity of such a hill range to Edinburgh city and large urban settlements have made the Pentland Hills Regional Park an all year-round destination.

The City of Edinburgh Council is undergoing a Service review which will impact the Parks & Greenspace Service and subsequently the PHRP team. There is however a recognition from the Council Senior leadership that Park Rangers are an essential role in the management of good quality parks and greenspaces and a decision had been made to extend the existing Seasonal Rangers and Estate workers contracts from 1st November until the end of December 2021, which allowed for more time to reflect on the new Service structure as part of the undergoing review. It is important to highlight however, that as a result of the continuing budget pressure, it is unlikely that the PHRP team would be able to replicate the successes of the 2021 Visitor season unless further funding can be secured early in 2022.

8.3 People counters

There is a clear need for PHRP team to get an understanding of visitor numbers accessing the Regional Park. To help manage the hot spot areas we would install 6 footfall counters. The counters can detect direction of travel for single visitors, pairs of visitors and even groups of visitors passing the sensor unit with a range up to 5 metres and over 90% accuracy. They would focus on key entrance points to detect "mob effect" with the system to better deploy resources and prevent anti-social behaviour.

It is hoped that various counters will be installed at key locations in 2022/23 following successful grant funding bids.

8.4 Eco campsite

People have wild camped for many years within the Regional Park. When carried out in small numbers, for short periods, and with respect for the local environment, this has caused few problems. In recent years however there has been an increase in the number of people camping, particularly on weekends with accompanying good weather. This has escalated further following the Coronavirus outbreak, with many now visiting in larger groups and exhibiting significant levels of antisocial behaviour. Evidence from staff engaging with these groups is that some are visiting from other parts of Scotland specifically to camp in these areas. Most of this activity is focused in the woodlands around the CEC owned reservoirs at Harlaw, Threipmuir and Bonaly, and within the lower woodland area of Bonaly Country Park.

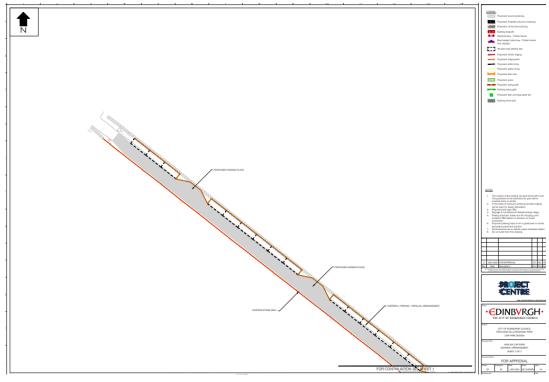


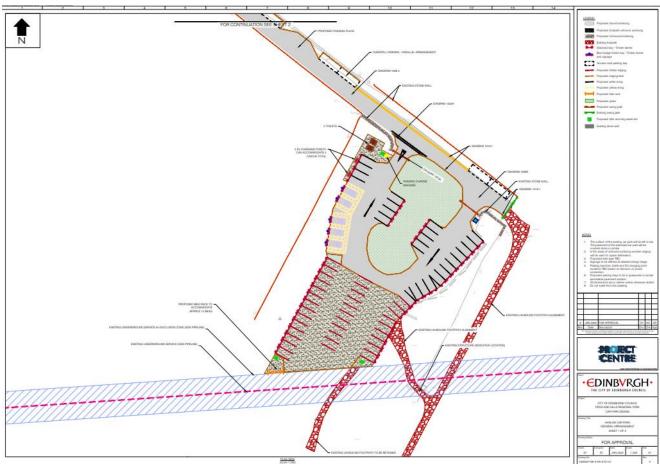
A recognised strategy to reduce anti-social behaviour in an area is to increase the presence of responsible visitors, who often deter those who don't act responsibly. Establishing a formal, but low-level seasonal "eco-campsite" at Harlaw would provide responsible campers with adequate facilities between April-October; give a regular presence to deter irresponsible activities; raise income to help cover establishment and servicing costs; assist in applying Park Management Rules by offering a managed and inexpensive alternative to those seeking to camp in a beauty spot.

A planning application is currently awaiting determination with the City of Edinburgh Council.

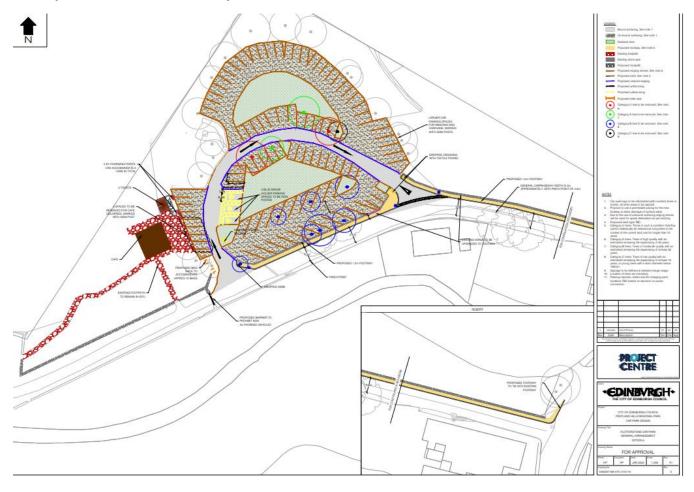
Appendix 1

1/ Proposal for Harlaw car park extension and access track

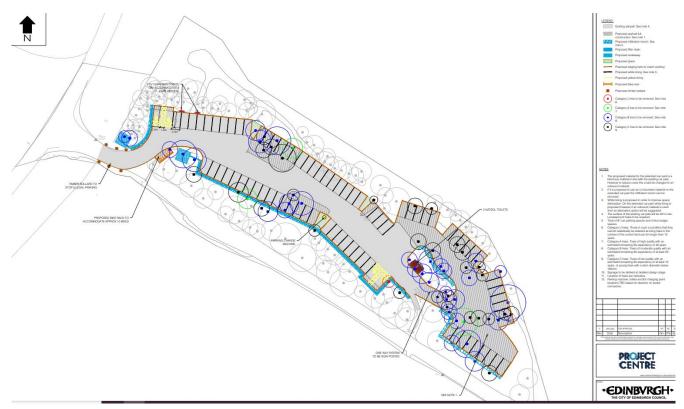




2/ Proposal for Flotterstone car park extension



3/ Proposal for Threipmuir car park extension



4/ Proposal for Bonaly car park extension

