

Core Path Plan Review – Caithness and Sutherland

Consultative Report – Sutherland

Introduction

The development of the existing core paths plan was part of The Highland Councils duties given in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (LR(S)A 2003). The existing plan was adopted by the full council in September 2011 after the plan had been through the statutory consultation process and also a Public Local Inquiry (PLI).

This Consultative Report is for the Sutherland area Sutherland in the Highland Council Core Paths Plan, the Sutherland area also includes the Edderton settlement zone. The review will take place alongside the consultation process for the new Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan. A single plan, Caithness and Sutherland Core Paths Plan will be produced and where appropriate the Core Paths will be shown on the Local Development Plan.

This Consultative Report has been produced as part of a review process, it is not a DRAFT Core Paths Plan as set out in Section 17 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Correspondingly the promotion of this Consultative Report is not the public notice of a Core Paths Plan as set out in Section 18 of the same act.

Public comments are welcome but the council is not seeking formal objections to the proposals at this stage. Any objections will be treated the same as other comments and should any proposal be put forward in a Draft Core Paths Plans the council will give notice, as set out in section 18, at a future date.

Aims

The review aims to;

1. Improve connectivity of the current plan by utilising existing routes.
2. Ensure current routes can be used, at a minimum standard of pedestrian use without significant impediment, by the general public.
3. Review mapping of existing plan to identify change of line of routes or identify where upgraded/new routes have been constructed or used differently by the public.
4. Work with Local Development Plan team to identify new routes within Settlement Development Areas (SDA), specifically those associated with a specific site in the SDA, these routes could be aspirational.
5. Consider the recommendations of the Public Local Inquiry report on The Highland Councils first core paths plan.

Assessment by Settlement Zone

A desk top survey has been carried out by officers, based on local knowledge and experiences from carrying out core path surveys. The proposed new routes and modifications detailed in this report come from this desk top survey and also suggestions made to The Highland Council since the adoption of the first core path plan. No on the ground survey work has been carried out directly related to this core path plan review.

What is a core path?

There is no strict definition of what a core path should be from the LR(S)A 2003, the act does however define a core path plan as a system of paths sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area. With this in mind it should be understood that the existing plan was designed to fulfil this sufficiency of path network.

Proposed core paths not currently in use by the public, say requiring works or upgrades, should have a reasonable likelihood of being delivered within 3 years of the reviewed plan being adopted. The adoption of a path or route as a core path places no duty on The Highland Council to carry out new path construction, upgrading works or maintenance of the route. The Highland Council does have powers to carry out works on a core path but these are discretionary and are aimed as ensuring routes remain free from obstruction and are not intended to be used for new path construction.

As well as the sufficiency of network the council shall have a statutory regard to the following points when reviewing the core path plan.

- the likelihood that persons exercising rights of way and access rights will do so by using core paths;
- the desirability of encouraging such persons to use core paths; and
- the need to balance the exercise of those rights and the interests of the owner of the land in respect of which those rights are exercisable.

Inclusion of minor public roads, footways, Long Distance Routes (LDRs), other long distance trails and public rights of way (PRoW).

The lack of inclusion of minor roads in the core path plan was something that raised objections in the consultation stage of the existing core path plan. The objections were not resolved and the matter was taken up at the Public Local Inquiry (PLI). The reporter for the PLI did not propose the objected to routes to be included in the core path plan but did recommend that the council establish if there was a justification for inclusion of minor roads when the plan is reviewed.

Another objection raised during the consultations for the existing core path was the lack of routes and connectivity of proposed routes within the wider area. This objection was again not resolved and the matter was addressed during the PLI by the reporter. The reporter recommended the council considers a range of strategic routes in the review of the core path plan.

The Highland Council considers the inclusion of more routes, as described above, to be a benefit but with the concern that the inclusion of too many routes would render the path plan meaningless in terms of its statutory objective to provide a "basic" network. Also it should be considered that roads are already managed on a statutory

basis under numerous road acts. The council, indeed any person, can promote the use of a road as parts of a path network without the requirement for the road to be a core path. Within an urban or large village settlement the council considers the public are reasonably expected to be aware of the extent of the public road network for them to exercise their right of access along the road without a requirement for the road or footway to be adopted as a core path.

In light of the reporter recommendations the council has produced a detailed table listing the route types, as mentioned above, that should be considered within the core path plan review that were not generally included in existing core path plans.

The table is shown in Appendix 1.

Proposals In This Consultative Report

There are two levels of proposals set out in this Consultative Report.

Firstly there are proposals which clearly meet the aims of the core paths plan review set out above. Typically these will be routes that are known to the council through previous visits or past community involvement etc. These are the routes intended to be proposed as core paths.

- Proposals that clearly meet the aims of the core path plan review are highlighted in a purple hue text box.

Secondly there are proposals that may meet the aims of the review but either further onsite investigation is required and/or public feedback is welcome on the use of the route for recreational purposes, link path or of amenity value. This Consultative Report seeks to assess public comment on these routes as potential core paths but the council is not proposing them at the present time.

- Proposals to further investigate a route and/or, seek public feedback on their use for recreational purposes, are highlighted in an orange hue text box.

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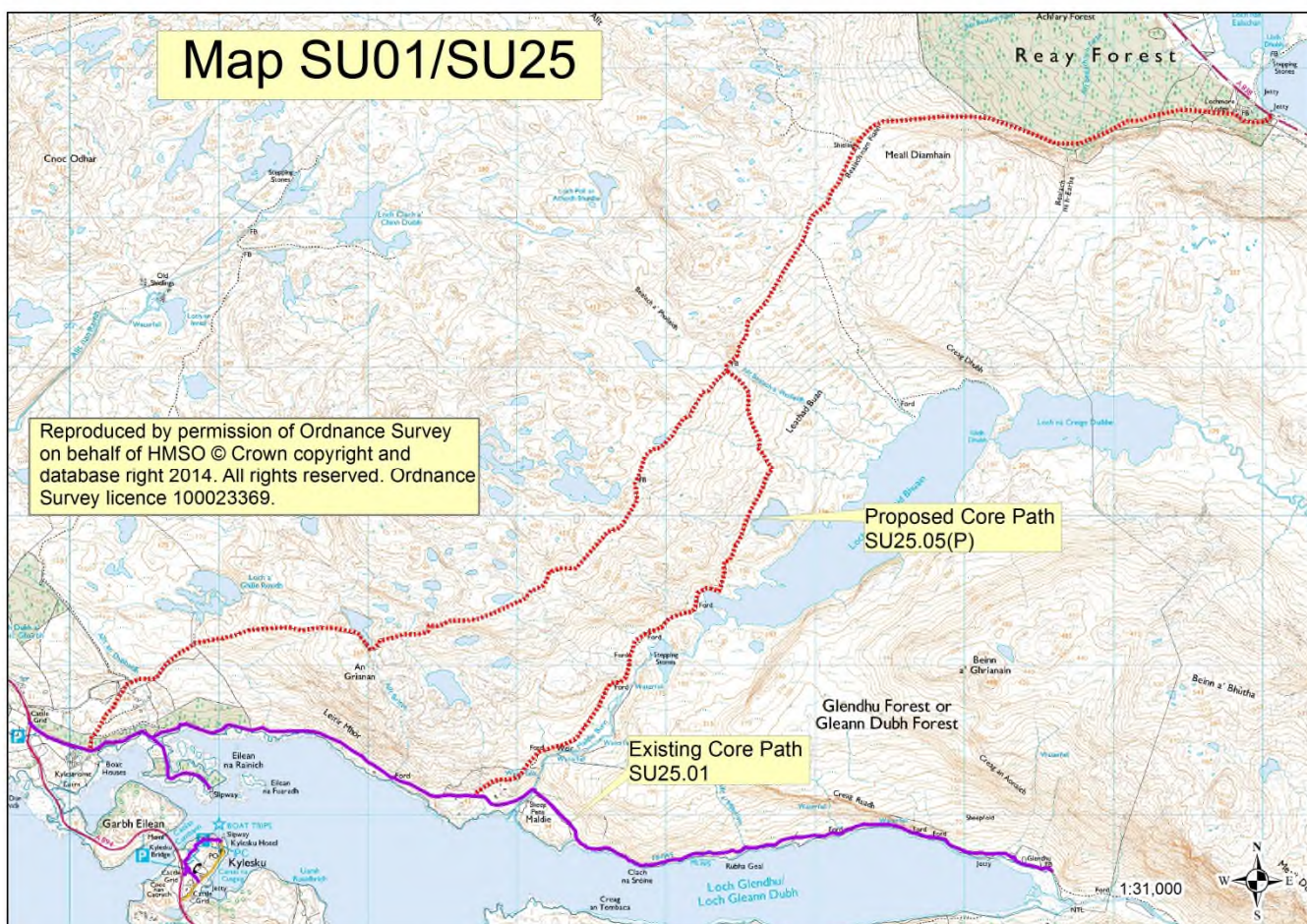
Sutherland

Achfary (settlement ref - SU01)

The Achfary settlement zone is a very sparsely populated area on the west side of Sutherland, whilst the area does have a coastline it is predominately inland covering an area from Laxford Bridge in the north to Loch Glencoul (Beinn Uidhe)/Loch Merkland in the south. There is a small hamlet at Achfary but the remainder of the settlement zone is uninhabited apart from dwellings situated along the A838.

There are two core paths in the area providing a large circuit along Strath Stack and then towards Loch Stack Lodge. There are few low level routes in the settlement and any proposed routes in the area would be classed as more remote longer distance, public rights of way, hill type routes. There have been upgrades in recent years to the public rights of way by the main land manger in the area, these have been to improve access for stalking and also as part of a run of the river hydro electric power generation scheme. There is the potential to consider these routes as part of the core path plan.

- Propose a core path SU25.05(P) from Kylestrome and Maldie Burn to Loch More, see Map SU01/SU25.



Altnaharra (SU02)

The Altnaharra settlement zone is a very sparsely populated area in the north central region of Sutherland. The small village of Altnaharra, located at the west end of Loch Naver, is at the centre of the settlement zone. The village is also the crossroads of the all the public roads in the settlement.

The settlement contains the popular hills of Ben Klibreck and Ben Loyal but lower level routes are less available and the settlement currently contains no core paths.

Altnaharra is the start/finish point of the Strathnaver Trail, a self guided tourist trail that links and interprets 29 archaeological sites along the length of Strathnaver. The sites are generally remote from the main villages and are generally used only during the tourist season by visitors. Given this reason the sites did not make candidate core paths in the previous core path consultation. However now the existing plan has bedded in, it is proposed to consider the sites promoted in the Strathnaver Trail as proposed core paths.

There are two Strathnaver Trail sites in the Altnaharra area, Grummore and Grumbeg. The routes are generally rough hill type desire lines, with limited path construction but overall the sites promote approx. 1.5km of circular route. It is proposed to investigate including these routes as core paths.

- Proposals to further investigate the Strathnaver Trail sites at Grummore and Grumbeg as potential core paths

Ardgay (SU03)

The Ardgay settlement zone covers an area from the village of Ardgay, at the head of the Dornoch Firth, along Strath Carron to the hamlet at Amat. The area is mainly agricultural (both crofted and farmed) with the remaining land under commercial forestry or traditional land holdings.

Forest tracks and fishers paths make up the existing core path network with a community woodland walk in Ardgay and desire lines to a hill above Ardgay.

The existing core path SU03.05 has been in practice replaced by a new track on the opposite side of the Allt Eiteachan burn. The footbridge over the same burn has also been washed away/fallen down so the original route for SU03.05 is not easily passable. Propose to realign SU03.05 to take in new track.

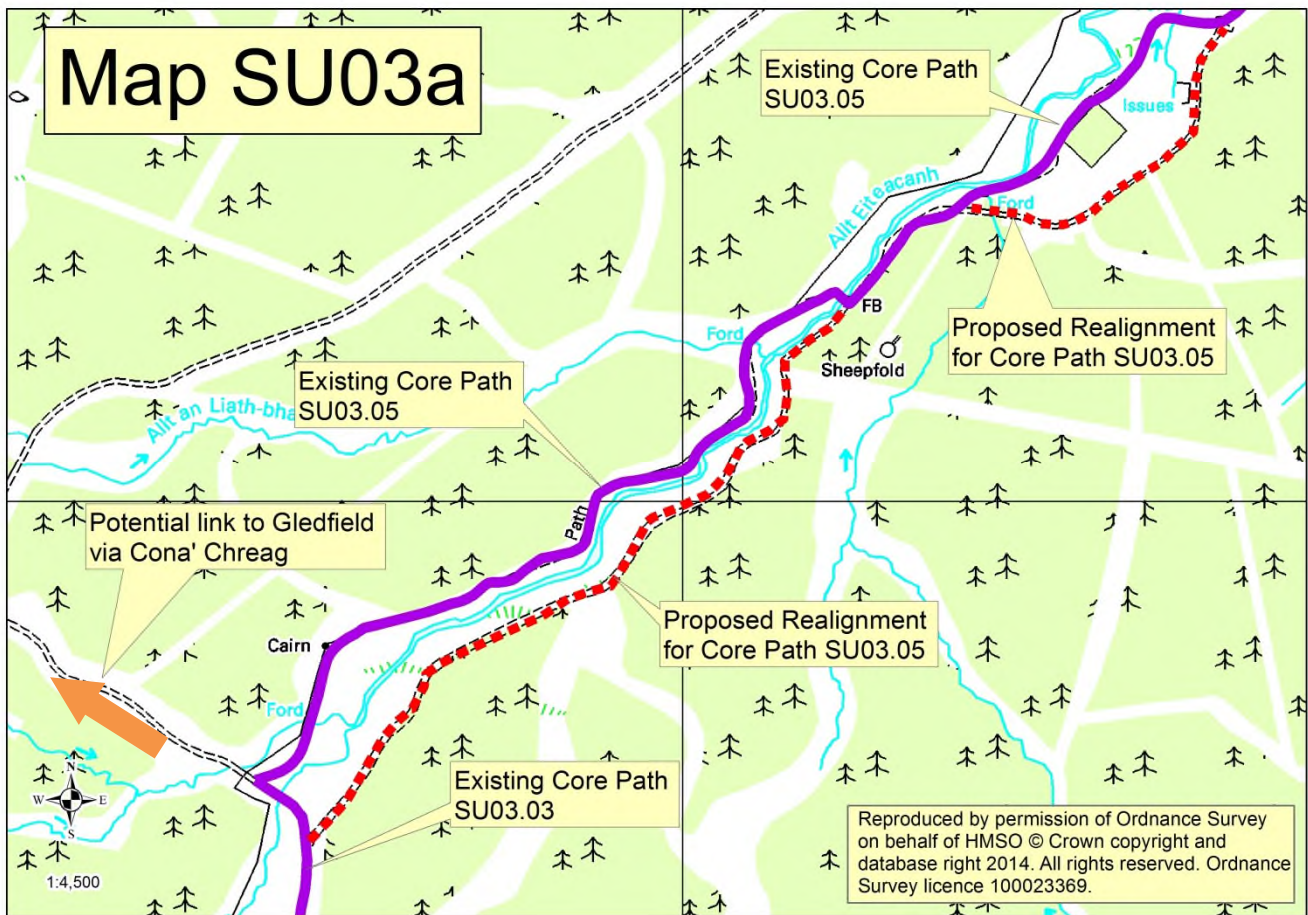
The existing core path plan has a network of routes to the old fort above Ardgayhill. All the routes highlighted during the consultations were included in to the core path plan. It is proposed to rationalise these route to propose a network of route that is better suited to the access as used and required by the public, improved mapping and aerial photography is now available to aid this rationalisation. The track by Oriel Cottage is well used but does not lead to any obvious end point; users take various desire lines once on open ground. It is proposed to keep the start point by Oriel Cottage as this offers the best access for users from Gledfield but to then take the most prominent desire line toward the fort from a point on the track at GR 259,264 890,651. The remainder of the track to be removed from the core path plan. There are two accesses to the core path in Ardgayhill, one to the north of the dwelling named Oakwivew and the other to the north of the dwelling named Hillcrest. Neither of these accesses is particularly welcoming at present, the Oakview route has been fenced across and the Hillcrest route is partially fenced across. A complicated gate arrangement is in place but it is not sure if this is to provide access to Hillcrest, or to allow Hillcrest access to the core path route.

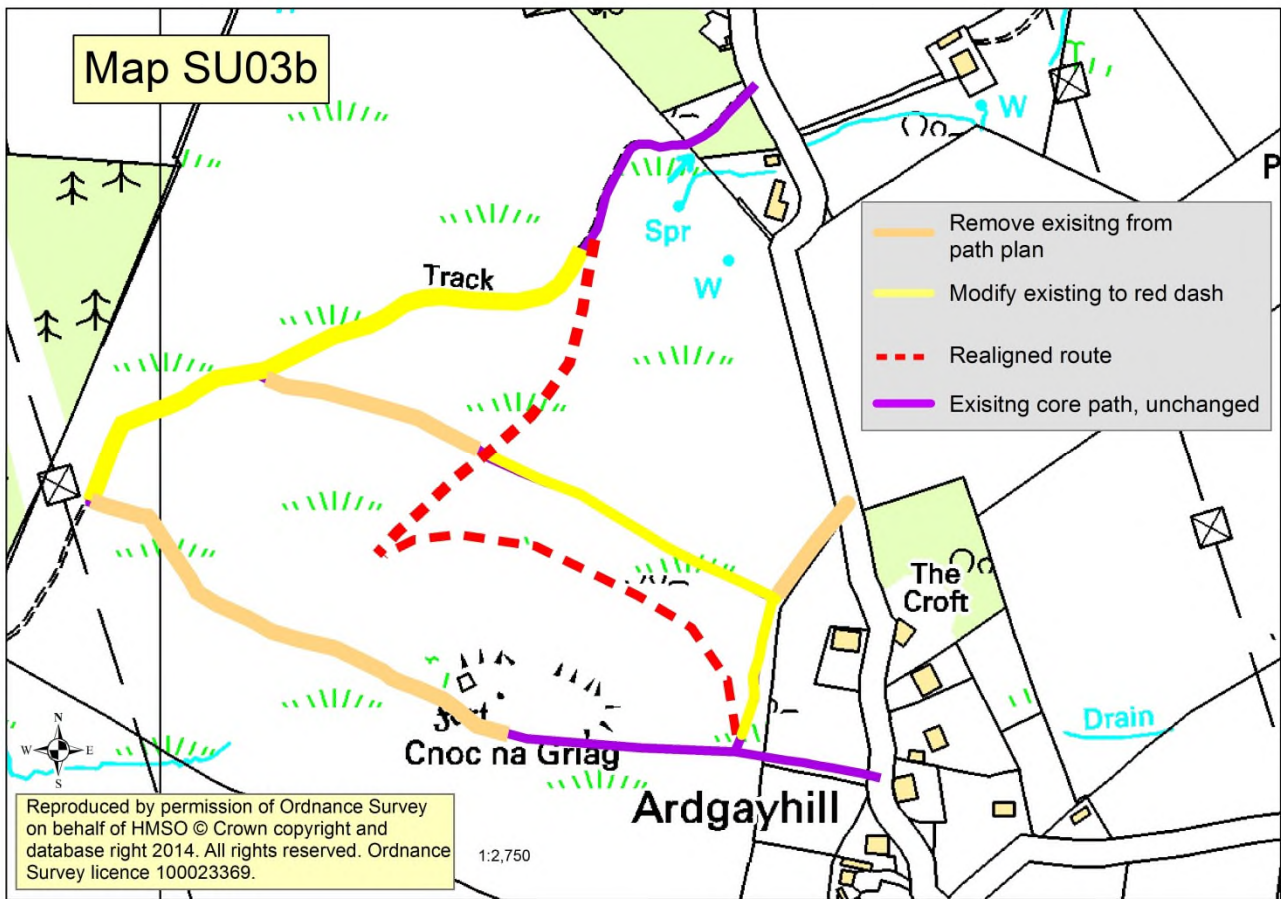
The councils preferred route is that from by the dwelling at Oakview. This route is the closest to the users coming from Ardgay and is a better exist on to the public road than that for the Hillcrest option.

The Badvoon/Garvary Forest blocks west of the Allt Eiteachan burn have been linked by new track construction to hill tracks on Gledfield Estate, they offer a circuit of a longer distance. This potential link may be considered should public demand for the circuit be forthcoming and feedback from the land owner/manager.

- Propose to realign SU03.05 to take in new track. See Map SU03a
- Propose to rationalise routes at Ardgayhill SU03.10, see Map SU03b

- Proposals to investigate the track from SU03.03/05 to Gledfield via Cona' Chreag as a potential core path





Bettyhill and Farr (SU04)

Bettyhill and Farr is a settlement on the north coast of Sutherland, it extends in land past Loch Naver towards Loch Coire. It includes Strath Naver from the Loch to the sea but the majority on the habited area is along the north coast from Skerray in the west to Armadale in the east with the main settlement at Bettyhill village.

There is an existing crofting track leading from the west side of the Bettyhill village area, from the A836, towards the Kirtomy-Swordly area and the core path SU04.22. It was not included in the existing core path plan but it makes an obvious link between core paths and is proposed as a core path.

There is a promoted route to the clearance village at Sletell which starts at Strathan in this settlement. The clearance village itself is in the tongue settlement zone. It is proposed to include the route from Strathan to Sletell.

One of the longer core path routes in the settlement zone is the forest tracks at Borgie Glen, SU04.03, these are on the east side of the River Borgie, there are also short trails close to the A836 on the west side of the River Borgie. The Borgie Glen core path were promoted by FCS for many years as a cycle trail and the core path can still used for that purpose as well as horse riding or pedestrian use. Generally this core path forms a circular route but there is a side branch that runs from the southern extremity of the circular route. This side branch does not lead to any point of interest, it is in the existing core path plan because it is the extent of the route as promoted at the time by the Forestry Commission. It did lead to a dead end in the track, but though the track has been since extended there is still no obvious point of interest. The council proposes to remove this section of core path as it does not consider the use of the route to be of interest to the wider public at this time.

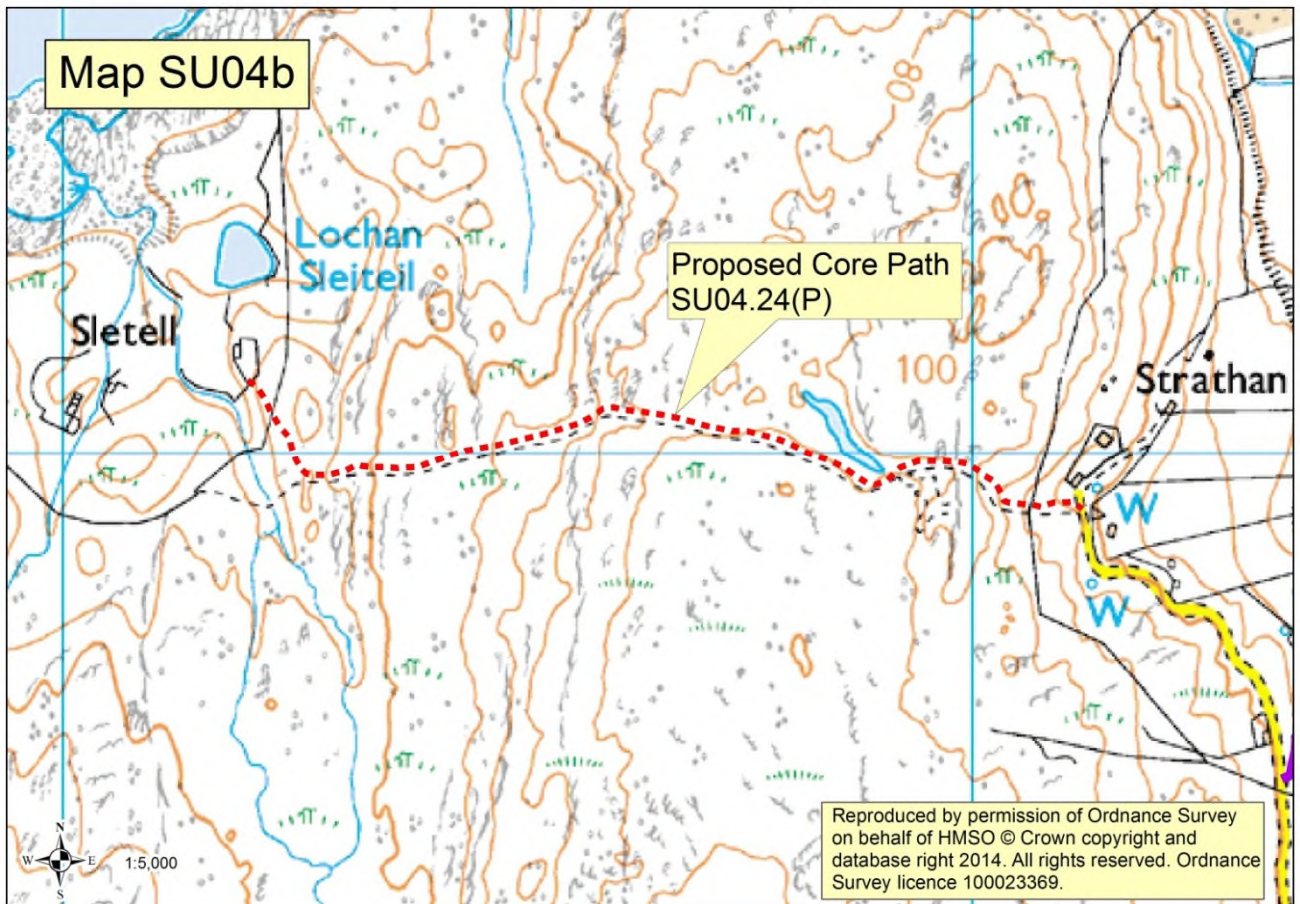
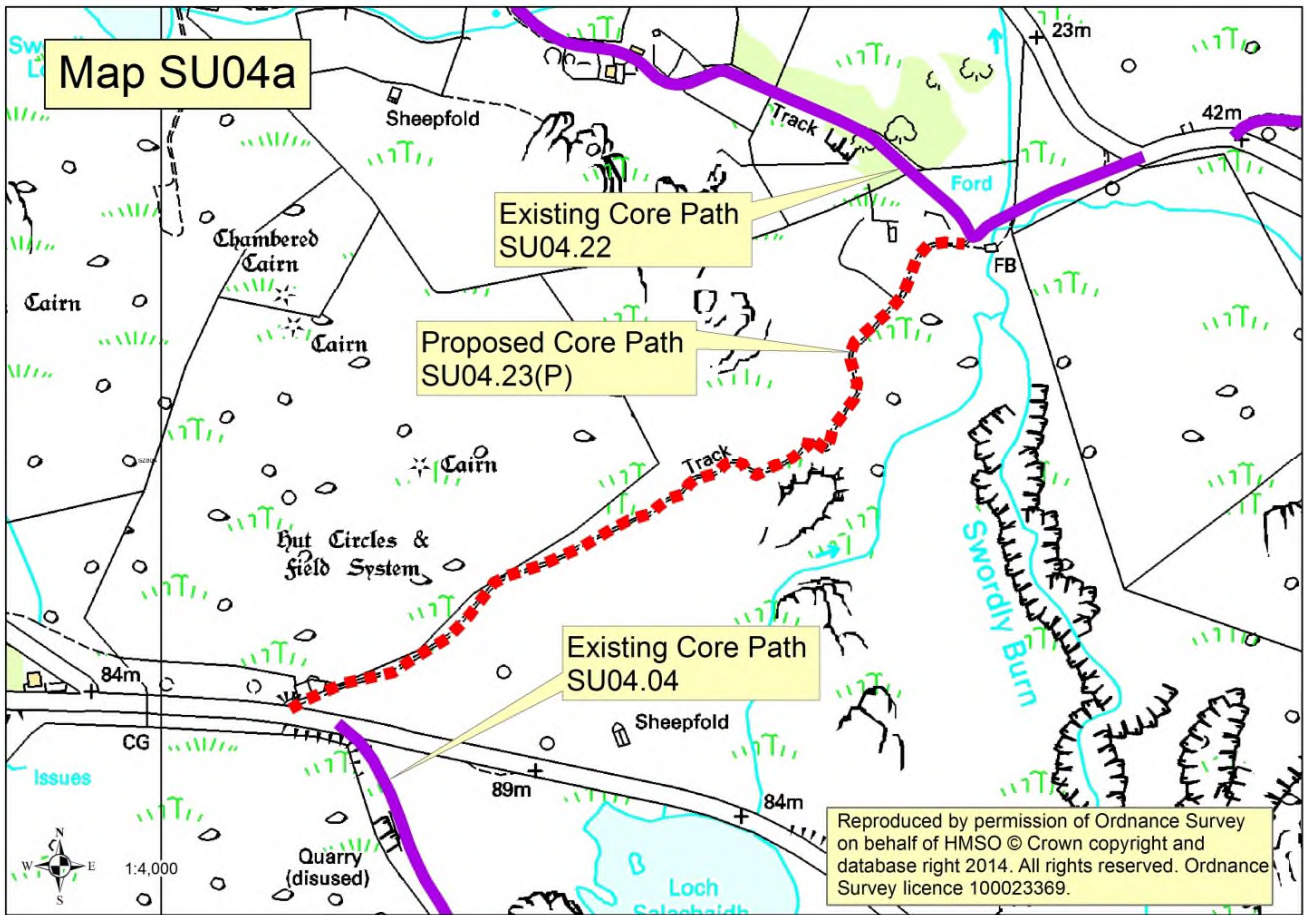
There is a new short trail at Borgie Glen leading to an art installation, The Unknown, which is situated on a small hill above the car park for the Borgie Glen core path SU04.03. It would make sense to include the new circuit to “The Unknown” as part of the core path plan to meet aim 3.

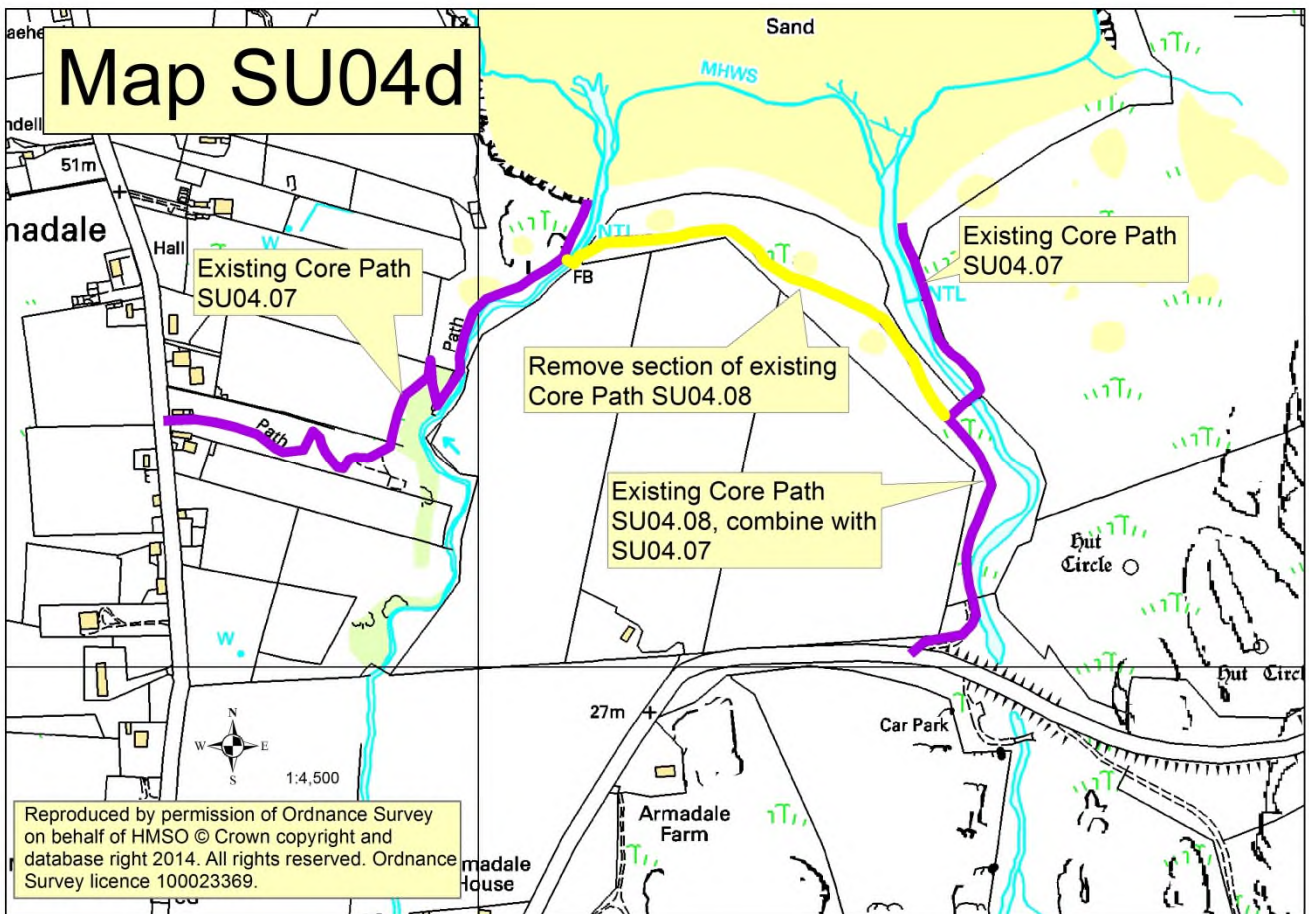
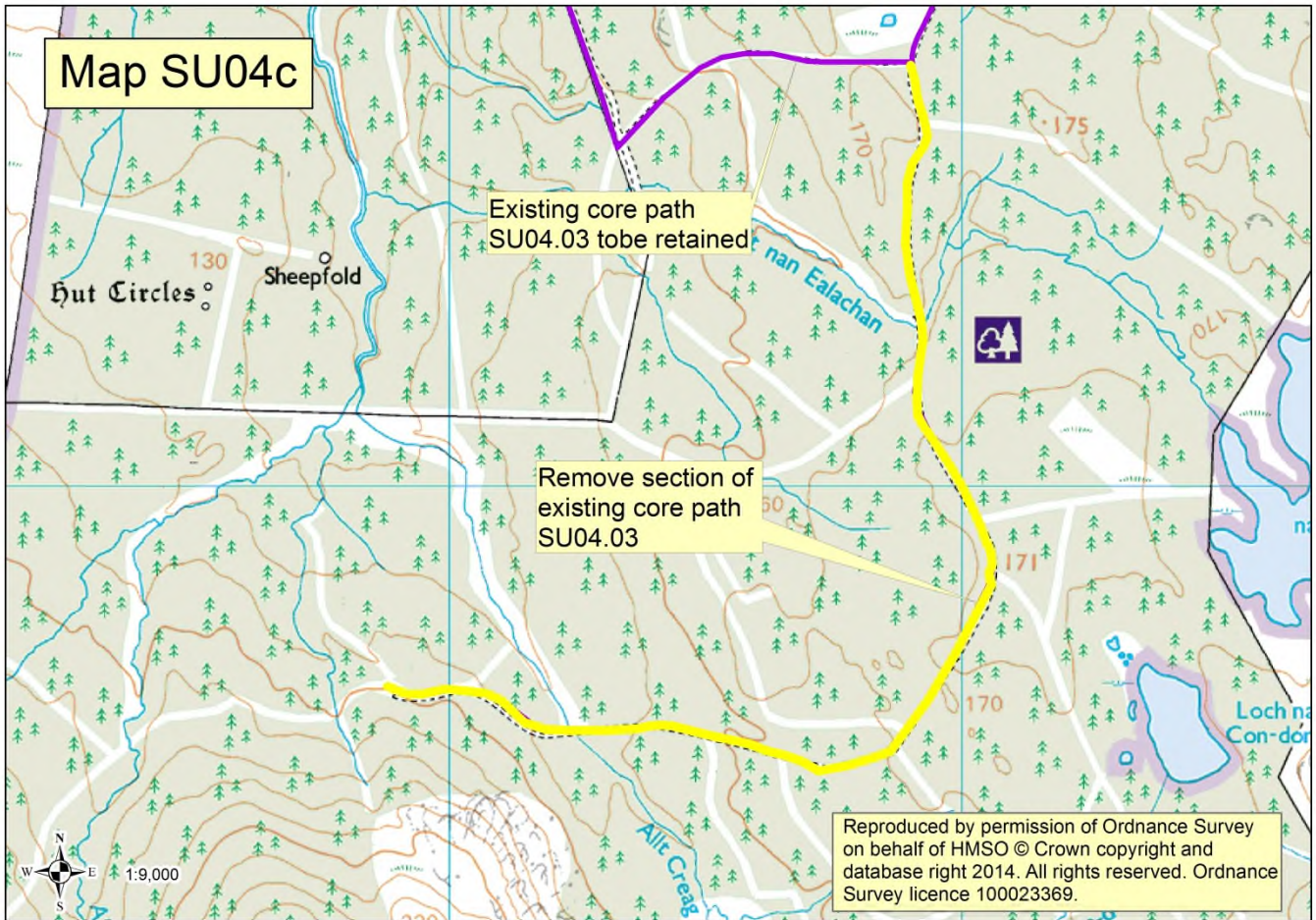
The settlement has a number of archaeological sites promoted through the Strahnaver Trail. A number of these sites are proposed to be included as core paths, these include the Skail Chambered cairn, the Red Priests Stone, Achanlochy clearance village, Coille na Borgie long cairn and the Achcoillenaborgie broch. These routes are for the most part path made through use and are maintained, in so far as the vegetation is trimmed, by The Highland Council. Each route will be assessed as been accessible before inclusion in the core path plan.

A number of other sites in the trail are not included as they are simple road side cairns/memorials with little recreational access involvement or are particularly remote like Truderscaig.

The exiting core path SU04.08, to Armadale Bay, starts on the A836. It links into SU08.09 which leads to the bay itself but it continues to meet the core path SU04.07 which comes from the Armadale unclassified road. The bridge link on the western burn at Armadale, the Allt Beag, was damaged during storms and has been removed. This means the link between the core path SU04.07 and SU04.09 is no longer passible. It is proposed to modify the core path plan to reflect this, access to the bay itself is not affected and users can still link the two core paths by using the beach, the burns are passible with relative ease when on the beach.

- Proposed new core path route SU04.23(P) leading from the A836 towards SU04.22, see map SU04a
- Proposed new core path route SU04.24(P) leading from Strathan to the clearance village at Sletell, see map SU04b
- Proposed to remove southern section of Borgie Glen core path, SU04.03, circular route retained. See map SU04c.
- Proposed new core path route SU04.25(P) leading from the Borgie Glen to “The Unknown”.
- Propose to investigate including Strahnaver Trail routes at Achanlochy, Skial, Red Piests Stone, Coille na Biorgie and Achcoillenaborgie into the core path plan.
- Propose to modify existing core path SU04.08 to take account of lost bridge, see Map SU04d.





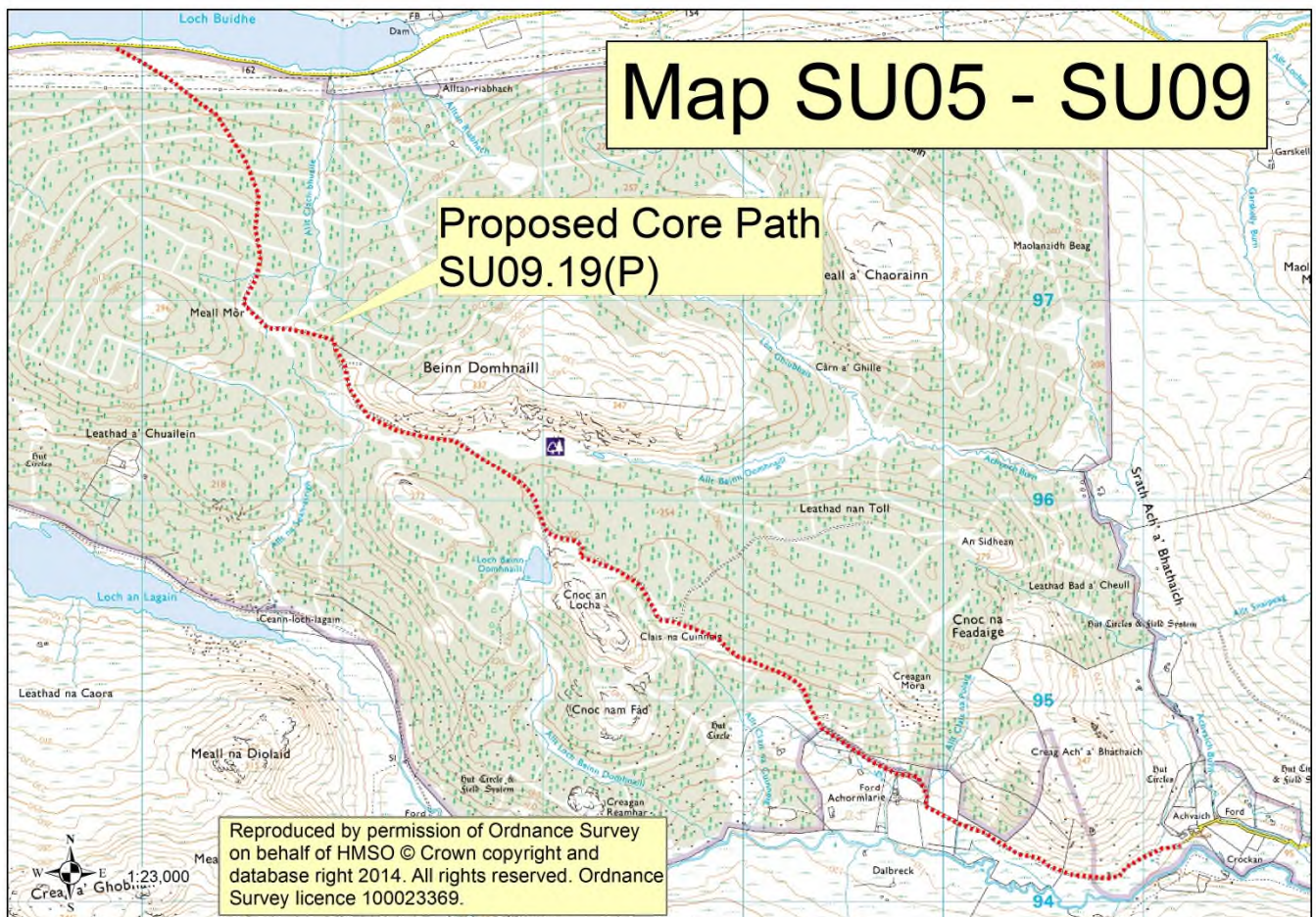
Bonar Bridge (SU05)

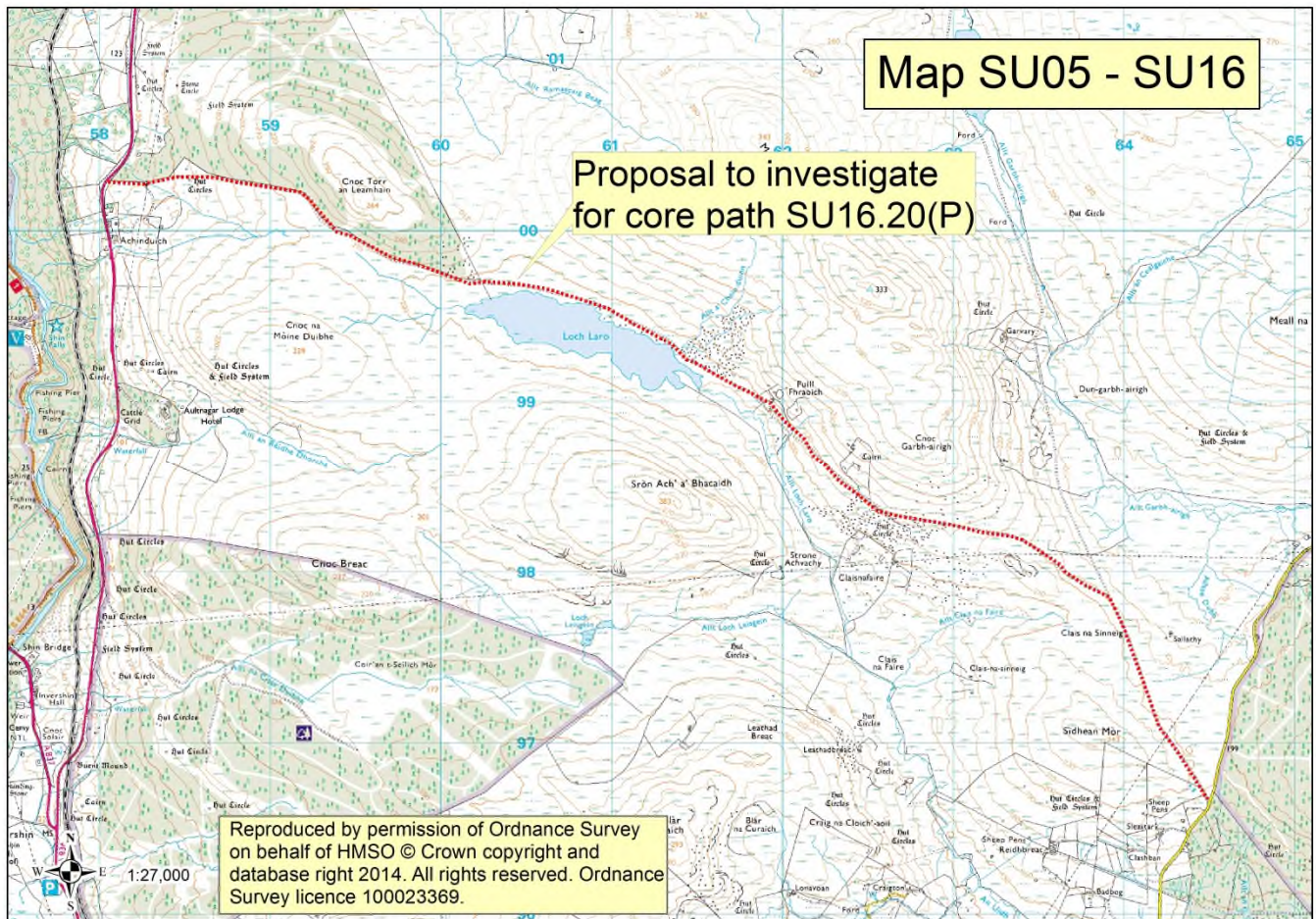
Bonar Bridge is a small settlement zone at the head of the Dornoch Firth and the lower reaches of the Kyle of Sutherland. Bonar Bridge is the main village with a smaller collection of dwellings at Inver Shin and a scattering of dwellings in the hinterland above Bonar Bridge at Airdens and Migdale.

There are two longer distance routes that have been identified as potential new core paths. One is the forest track from Loch Buidhe that heads towards Achvaich by Dornoch. This track is well maintained and provides a link between the settlement zones of Bonar Bridge and Dornoch. The other route suggested is the path from Achinduich, on the Lairg road, toward Sleastary by Loch Buidhe. This path is an old traditional route and there is some concern that the middle section of the route is in a poor condition and is not easily accessible to the public.

- Propose the route from Loch Buidhe to Achvaich as a core path, SU09.19(P), see Map SU05-SU09.

- Propose to investigate the path from Achinduich to Sleastary as a potential core path, SU16.10(P), see Map SU05-SU16.





Brora (SU06)

Brora is a large coastal settlement on the east coast of Sutherland, the main village is Brora itself but the area extends north along the coast to Glen Loth and inland to Ben Armine and the head of Strath Brora at Rihlochan. The core path network as existing provides an extensive network in and around Brora but the remaining areas along the coast and Strath Brora lack any core paths.

One of the existing core paths SU06.06, Jubilee Walk East, has suffered storm damage and it is only possible at present to access a short section of the route. There are no short term solutions to repairing the damaged section of core path, should there be no medium term scheme to reinstate the route it is proposed to modify the existing core path to only that which is accessible at present. Another nearby core path is that to Brora beach, the mapped start for this route is not what is used, it proposed to modify the start of the core path to reflect the route used by the public

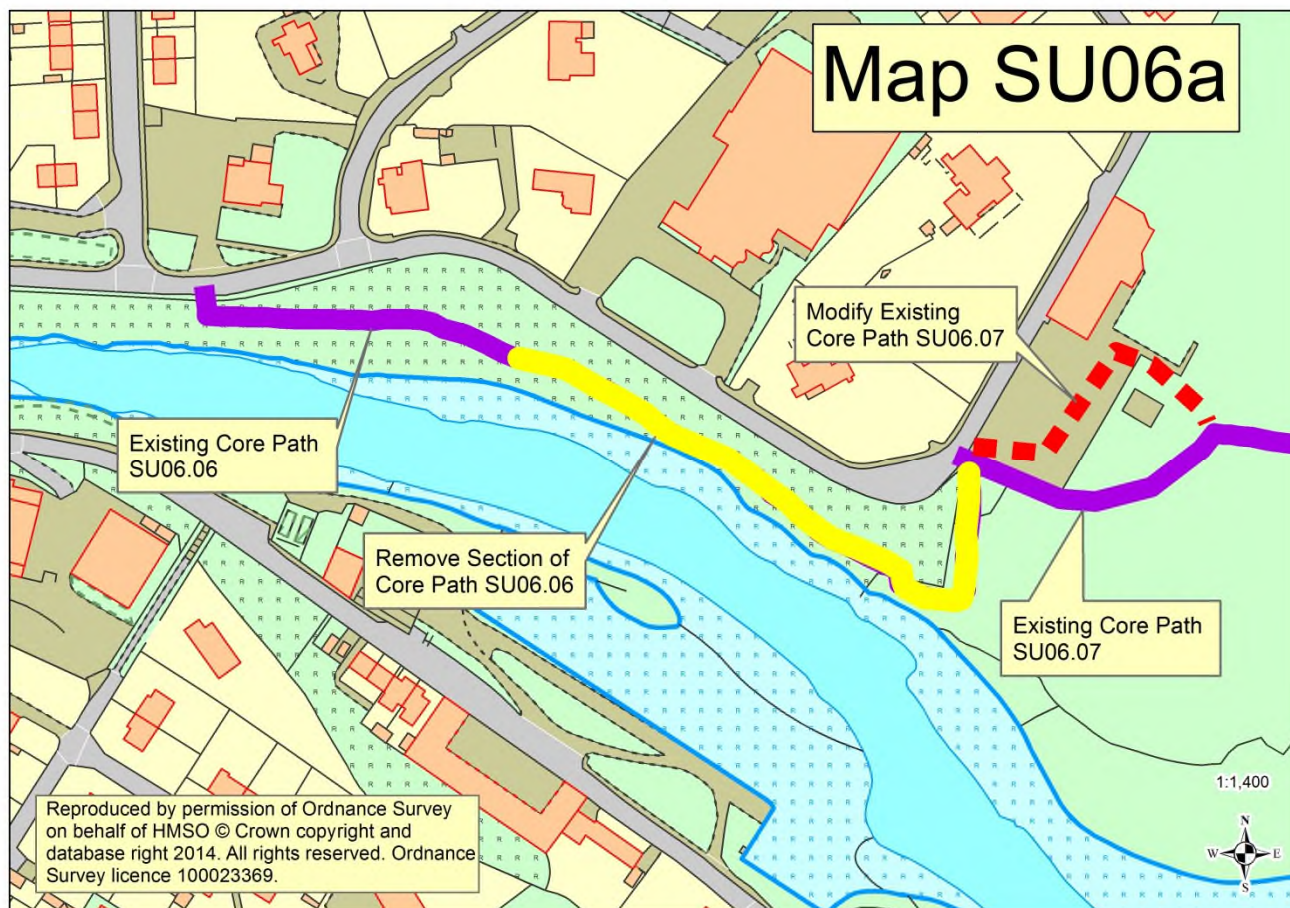
Along the coast to Glen Loth is particularly lacking in any recreational access opportunities, due in part to the narrow linear nature of the transport corridor containing the A9 trunk road and the Far North Rail Line but also with the ground immediately inland raising very steeply. Many of the tracks heading from the A9 inland do offer routes for access takers but they do not strongly meet the criteria set out on appendix 1, primarily the demand from the public is lacking. There is an access opportunity at Crackaig to access the coast by Lothbeg Point and Crackaig Links. This is a popular spot, also it is the site of a caravan site, it is proposed to investigate this area for the provision of a core path.

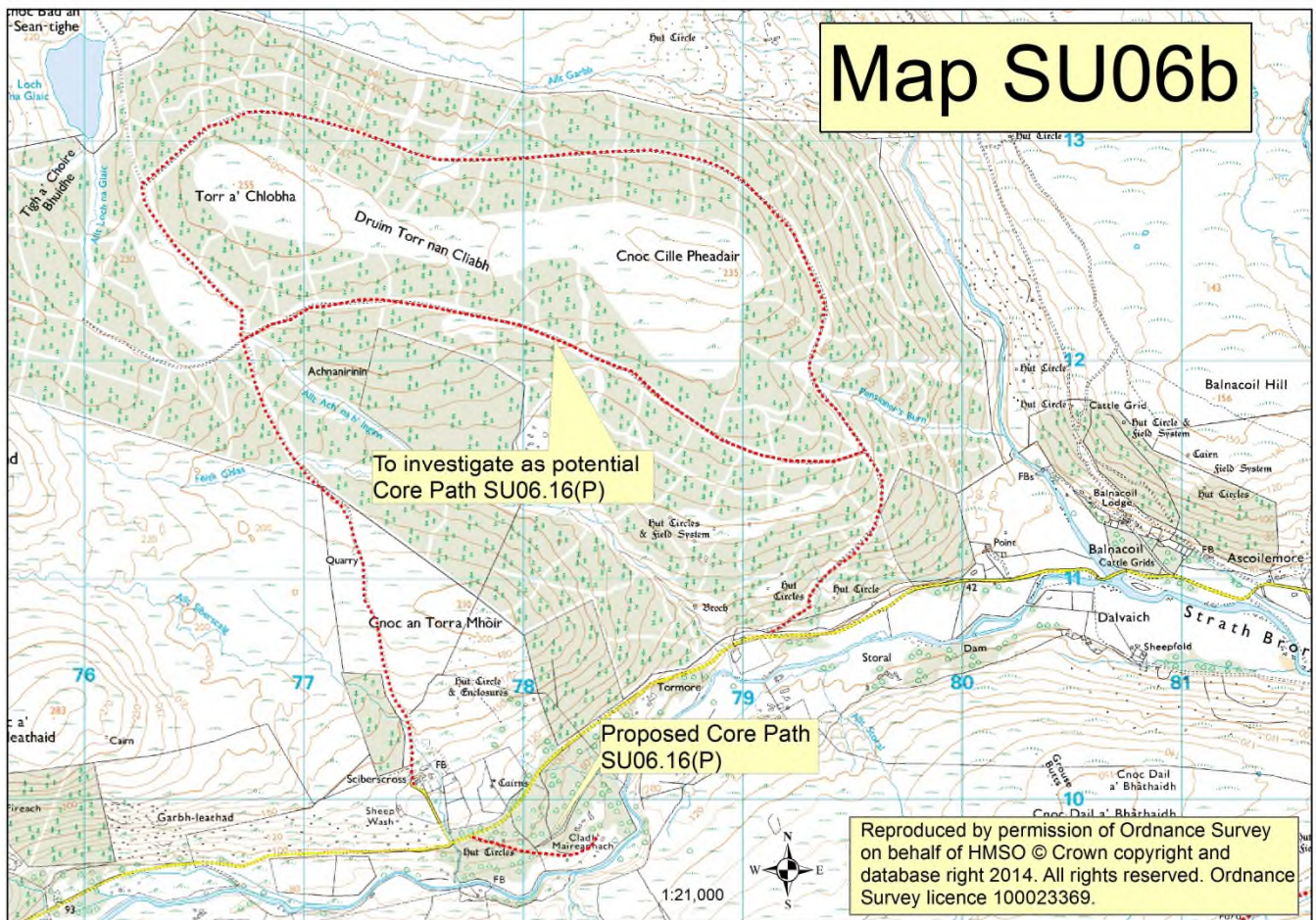
Whilst there are few core paths in Strath Brora there are numerous opportunities for recreational access takers to go off the beaten track. For example following the Black Water river from Balnacoil, wind farm tracks at Gordonbush and the long track in to Ben Armine. These routes do provide a resource for the keen access taker but when looking at criteria in Appendix 1 they do not meet many of the reasons to include. There is a network of forest tracks at Sciberscross which again can be used by the public, one advantage of these forest tracks is that they form a circular route and are therefore more satisfying for use by the general public. It is proposed to investigate the forest tracks at Sciberscross as potential core paths.

Nearby to the forest at Sciberscross is a previously promoted route to an historic Cemetery and other archaeological feature. The majority of this route is on an existing track and the remainder is a well formed route created through use. It is proposed to include the route to cemetery and other features at Sciberscross.

- Propose to modify existing core path SU06.06, Jubilee Walk (East), to take account of storm damage on section of route. See Map SU06a.
- Propose to modify existing core path SU06.07 to that as used by users. See Map SU06a
- Propose route to Sciberscross Cemetery as a core path, SU06.16(P), see Map SU06b.

- Propose to investigate a new core path circuit at Sciberscross Forest, SU06.17(P) see Map SU06b.
- Propose to investigate routes at Crackaig to provide access to Lothbeg point and the Crackaig Links.





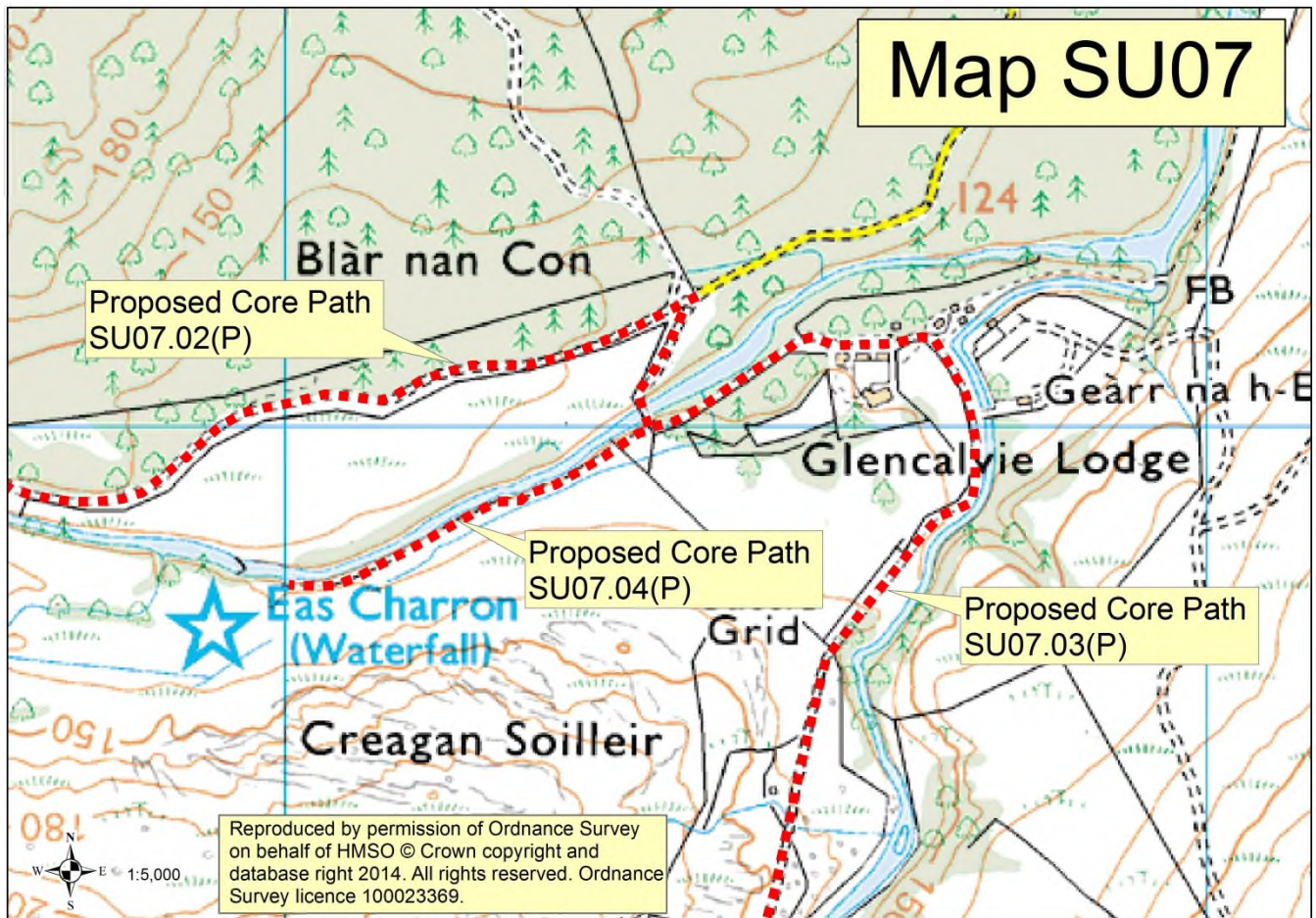
Croick (SU07)

Croick is very sparsely populated rural settlement in southern Sutherland, it is in land locked and much of the area is rough mountainous upland. The area has just one core path leading from the small hamlet at Croick towards Glen Einig. There are opportunities for other similar long distance, strategic routes towards Ross and Cromarty in the south which would meet the criteria set out in Appendix 1.

Both routes start at the public road end by Amat, one leads past Glencalvie Lodge towards Diebidale and a glen named Glac an t-Seilich and then Strath Rusdale in the Ardross settlement, the other leads past Alladale lodge and into Gleann Mor – Strath Vaich before meeting the public road at Black Bridge in the Garve settlement.

The only shorter route of interest in the settlement of is that to the Eas Charron waterfall, again this is by Glencalvie at the public road end at Amat. It is proposed to include these routes as a core path.

- Propose the Glencalvie – Diebidale - Strath Rusdale route as a core path, SU07.02(P). Start of route is shown on Map SU07
- Propose the Glencalvie – Alladale – Gleann Mor – Strath Vaich – Black Bridge route as a core path, SU07.03(P). Start of route is shown on Map SU07
- Propose the path to Eas Charron waterfalls as a core path, SU07.04(P), see Map SU07



Culrain (SU08)

Culrain is a small settlement in central Sutherland, it essentially covering the southern side on the Kyle of Sutherland from the main settlement at Culrain, close by Invershin, towards Doune/Langwell just short of Oykel Bridge. The majority of the areas habited dwellings are along the Kyle with the interior predominantly commercial forestry. There is a public road along the south side of the Kyle of Sutherland but the main A-class roads by pass the settlement as they travel along the north side of the Kyle.

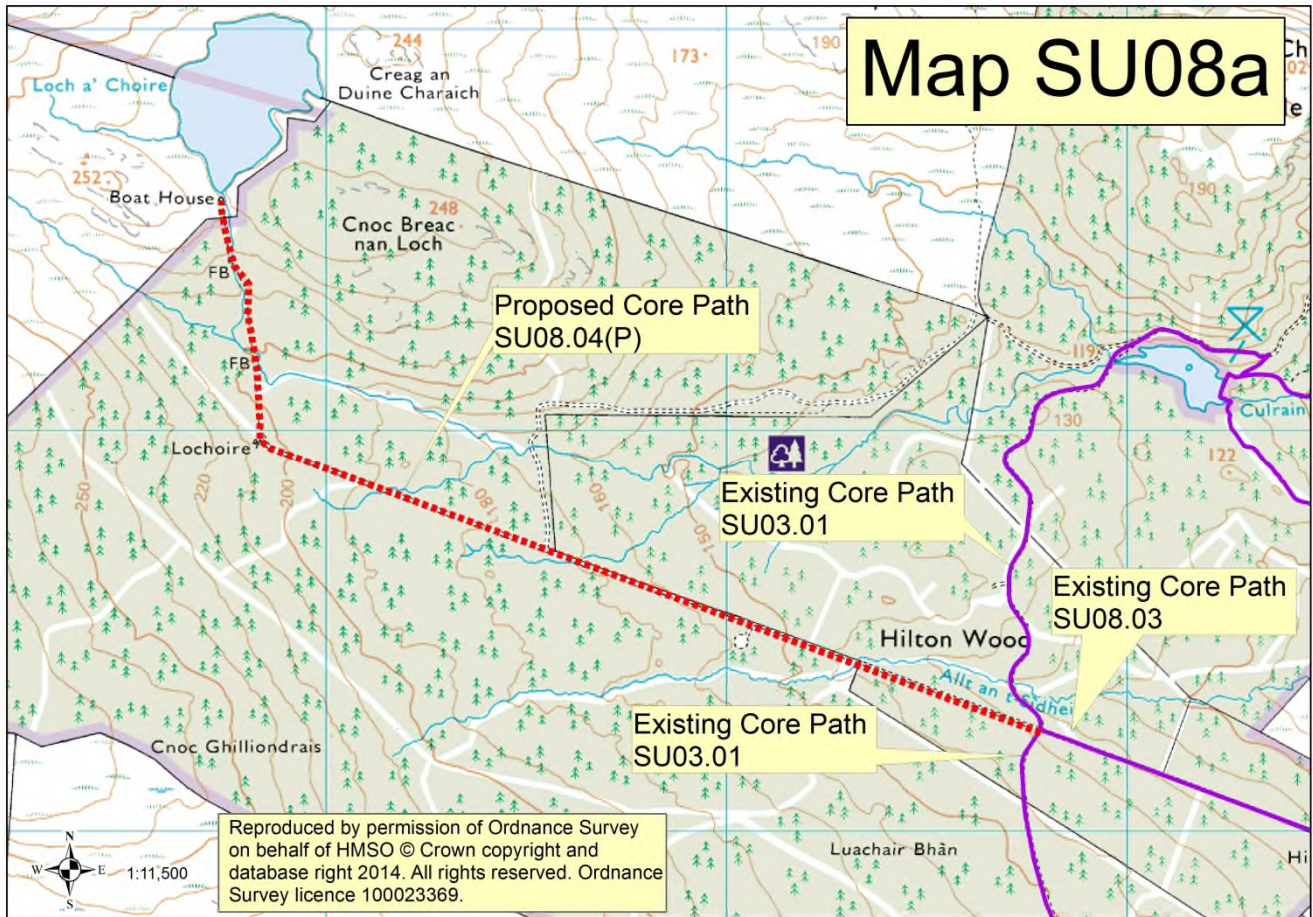
The existing core path plan is focused in and around the Culrain settlement with a system of paths and cycle routes in the Carbisdale Forest managed by FCS. There is a link to Ardgay and also a footbridge over the Kyle of Sutherland attached to the railway viaduct. The majority of the area does not have any core paths, given the large scale forestry there are tracks available but the recreational value of them is limited as often they do link with places or interest or provide circular route.

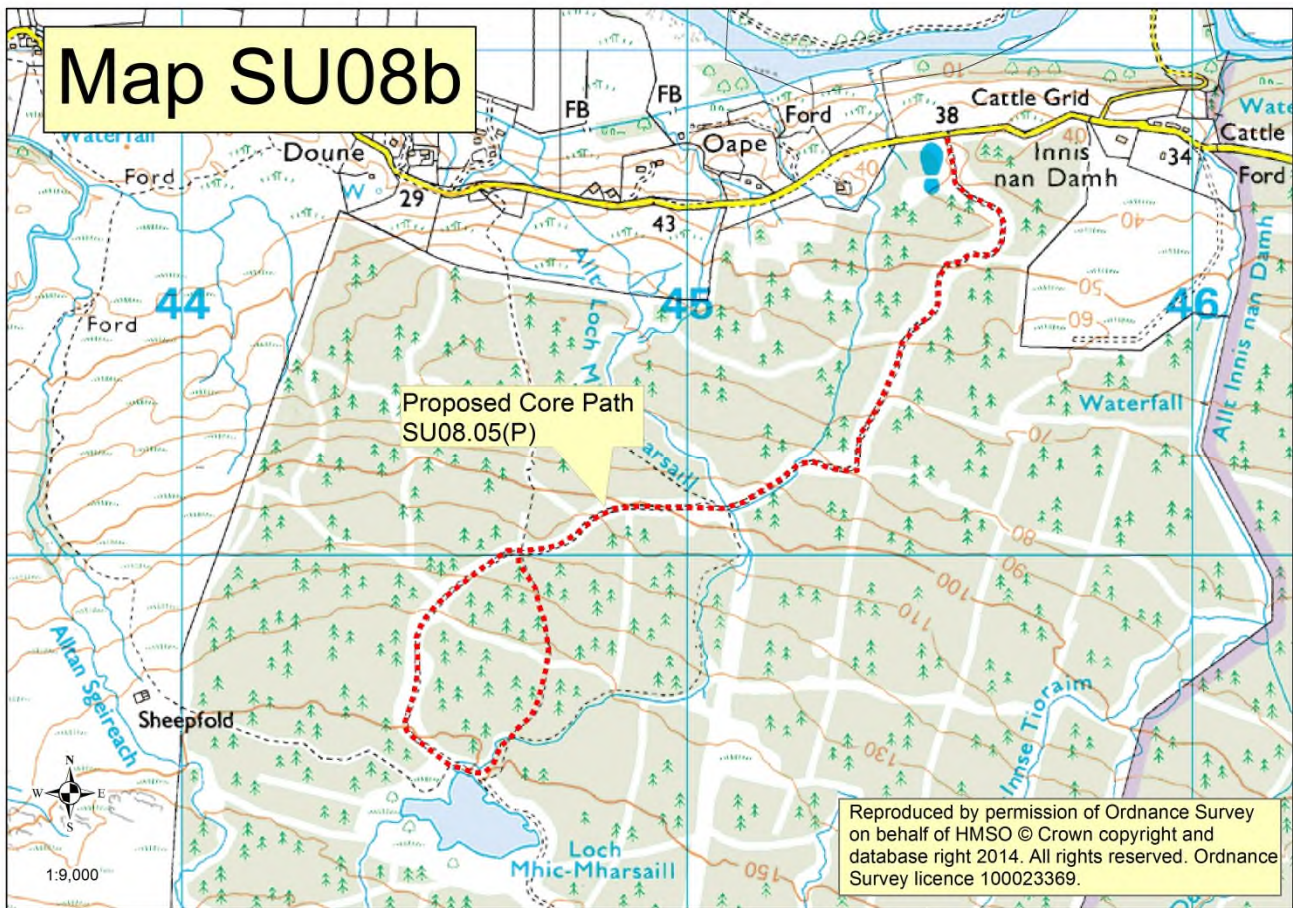
A route to Loch a' Coire from the existing core paths SU08.03 and SU03.01 has been improved since the previous core path plan was consulted on. It is a natural extension to route SU08.03 and it is proposed to include this route as a core path.

There is a forest walk promoted on the OS Explorer maps to Loch Mhic-Mharsaill, it is privately managed and assumed to have been a grant aided scheme. It is fairly remote so scored lower than required to be a core path in the previous core path consultations. Assuming the route is useable by the public the circular route would improve the routes available in the core path plan, it also provides a start to a wider system of forest tracks, in the area.

- Propose to include route from core path SU08.01 and SU03.01 to Loch a'Choire as a core path SU08.04(P). See map SU08a.

- Propose to investigate the route to Loch Mhic-Mharsaill as a potential core path, SU08.05(P), see map SU08b





Dornoch (SU09)

Dornoch settlement zone is in the south east of Sutherland, the main village is Dornoch with the village of Embo just to the north. A number of other spread out settlements/hamlets are in the area; Spinningdale, Clashmore, Torboll, Rearqhar etc. It is well provisioned with core paths in terms of the variety of landscape/settings from coastal to forestry to native woodland.

The proposed core path SU09.19(P) from Loch Buidhe to Achvaich is described in the Bonar Bridge settlement. See Map SU05-SU09. In the first core path planning consultation a core path was proposed to access Dun Creich, this route was objected to and the objection was upheld by the PLI reporter. It is expected that the issues leading to the objection will remain and the council does not see it appropriate to propose the route as core path during this review.

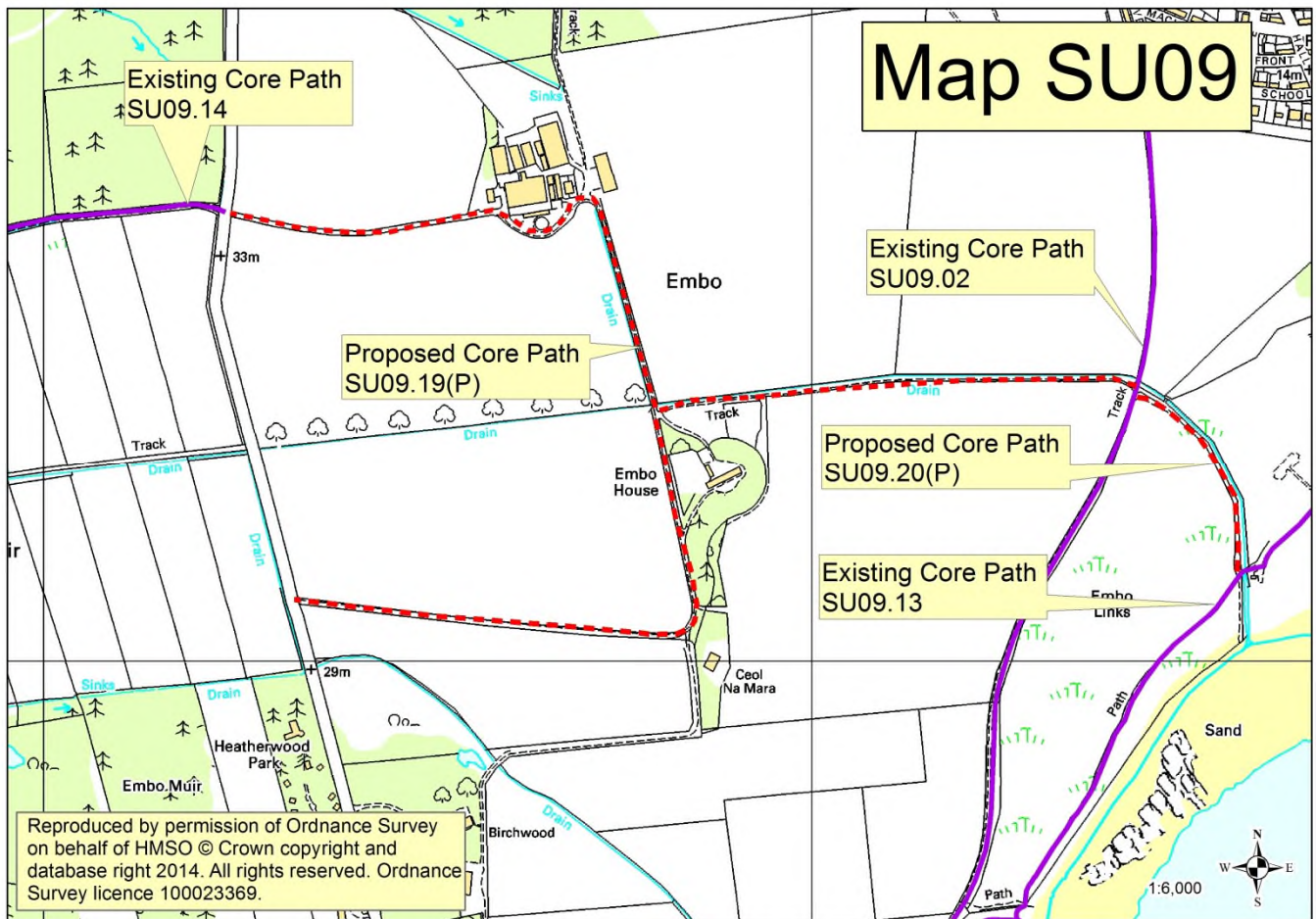
There is a network of routes in the Spinningdale area promoted by the land owners, the Woodland Trust Scotland. Since the previous planning consultation there has been a new track constructed to the A'Chraigs summit/viewpoint and also a path to the Fairy Glen has been promoted. These are proposed to be included as core paths.

A longer distance route that is a potential core path route is the track from Overskibo to Sleastary, the track is less used than the similar Loch Buidhe to Achvaich track and is in a poorer standard in the middle section of the route after the ford crossing of the River Evelix. Given the condition on the route it is proposed to investigate the route at this time as a potential core path.

There is an existing core path north from Embo, SU09.03, Embo - Coul Links Railways Track. It is well used from the Embo end of the route however the finishing point at Skelbo is not well used and is currently blocked due to agricultural fencing. There has been no public demand to retain the old railway line on the core path at this point. The link from Embo to Skelbo is a useful route and it is proposed to investigate alternatives.

- Propose the new track to A'Chraig and the route by Fairy Glen, both Spinningdale as core paths.
- Propose to link existing core paths SU09.14 and SU109.02 via tracks at Embo House and Embo Mains, SU09.19(P), see Map SU09
- Propose to link existing core paths SU09.02 and SU19.13, SU09.20(P), see Map SU09.

- Propose to investigate the route from Overskibo to Sleastarry as a potential core paths.
- Propose to investigate an alternative finish to the core path SU09.03 at Skelbo.



Drumbeg (SU10)

Drumbeg is a small rural settlement on the north coast of the Assynt peninsula. There are a series of townships along the B869 road, Culkein Drumbeg, Nedd and Drumbeg itself with the interior of the settlement rough peatland. There are limited new recreational access opportunities on definable routes from those already shown in the core paths plan. Two tracks/paths do provide access to the foreshore and these are proposed as core paths though the amenity value is limited.

- Propose the track to Oldany Jetty and the path to Port Dhrombaig as core paths.

Durness (SU11)

Durness is a large settlement zone in the North West of Sutherland, the main settlement being Durness and its associated dwellings/crofts at Leirin and Sangomore. The area contains Cape Wrath, the north western most tip on mainland Scotland and it extends into the interior of the country to Ben Hope and then Althnaharra. The core paths plan is focussed around Durness itself and, due to previous community and LA involvement, it has a reasonably extensive path networks. As well as Cape Wrath the other main attractions to visitors are Smoo Cave and the beaches at Sango, Balnakeil and Ceannabeinne.

The local community have been promoting a self guided route at the cleared township at Ceannabeinne. The route is predominately a path made through use with some minor path works in limited areas. There are panels and car parking off the A838. The site is one of the few to offer historical information and it is proposed to investigate including the route, or part, in the core paths plan.

There are a number of existing core paths to the south of Durness leading to Loch Meadaidh, suggestions have been made previously to try and connect these core paths with peat tracks to the south of Loch Meadiadh at Cnoc Leathan. Whilst the tracks from the existing core paths at Loch Meadaidh and those up from Keodale to Cnoc Leathan are suitable for core paths they do not actually meet up and form the circuit as would be desirable. There is a short, ~ 400m, section that does not have any constructed or desire line over it. Given the ground covered is very rough (peat hags and groughs) it would be an ambitious proposal to contact these tracks in a way suitable for use as a core path. This link will not be considered as a core path unless suitable proposal come forward with a reasonable chance of delivery.

Another route previously suggested to the council is the route to Laid from Durness over the Bealach Beag between Beinn Ceannabeinne and Meall Meadhonach. The route is a constructed track on the Durness side but is a route formed through use on the Laid side. Whilst it is way marked it is not considered clear enough on the ground to be considered at this time as a core path.

There are two longer distance routes in the settlement area which are potential core paths, both are recorded public rights of way and are distinct on the ground and can be followed with relative ease. The first is the Gobernuisgach to Loch Merkland track, this is a constructed track and is passible by a range of users. It provides a strategic link within the centre of the county. The other route is the Moine Path from Strath More to the Kyle Of Durness by Kinloch Lodge. This route is less clear but was once a well constructed path and it is clearly visible to the user. Some sections have lost features such as culverts so can be seen as more of a low level hill path but the route provides a link of historic and amenity interest.

- Propose to investigate trails at the cleared township at Ceannabeinne for inclusion in the core paths plan.
- Propose to investigate the longer distance routes from Loch Merkland to Gobernuisgach and also the Moine Path from Strath More to Kinloch/Kyle of Tongue as potential core paths

Golspie (SU12)

Golspie is a well populated settlement on the east Sutherland coast. It is a small settlement area covering the interior along Dunrobin Glen and the coastline from the Carn Liath broch in the north to Littleferry/ The Mound in the south.

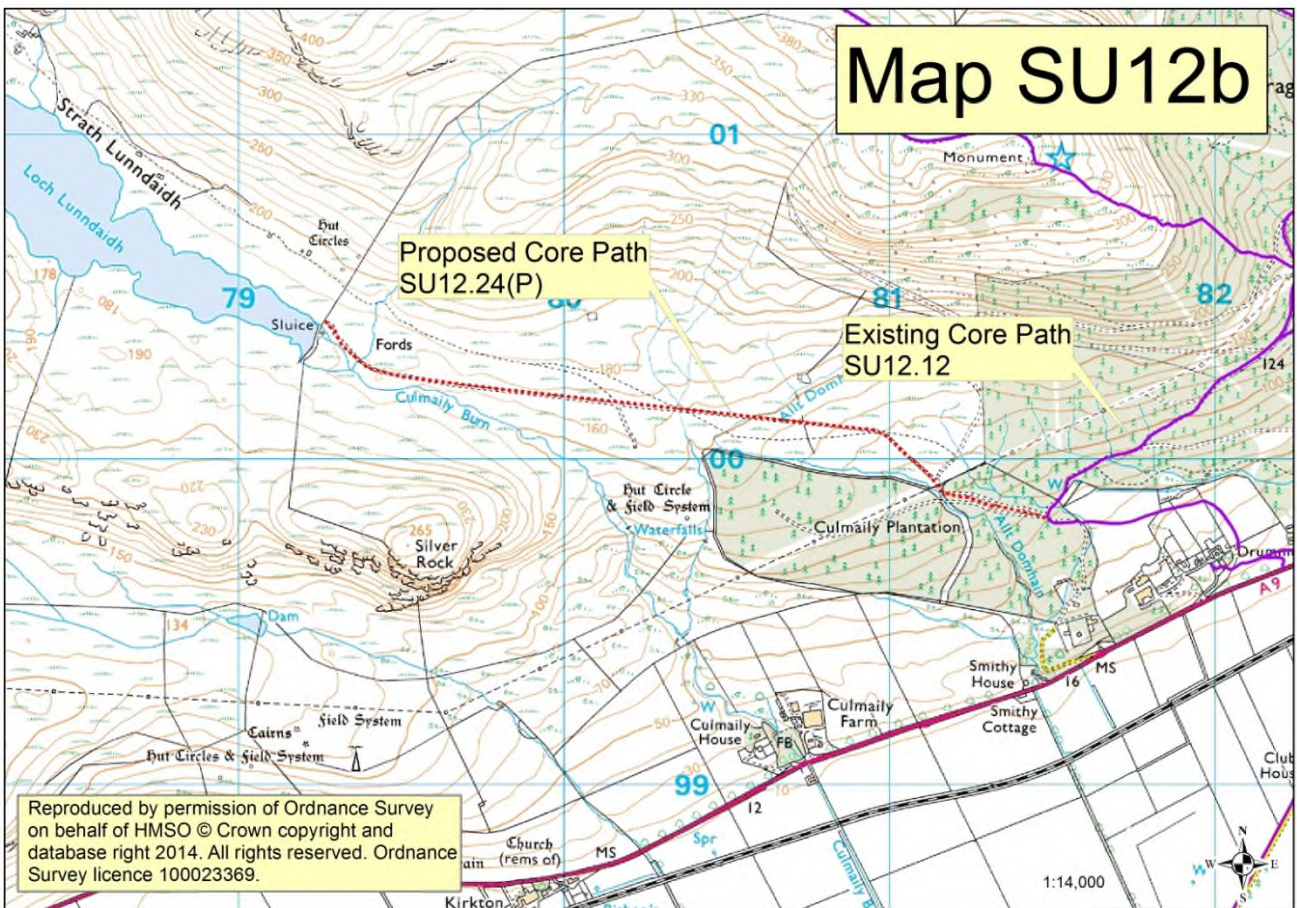
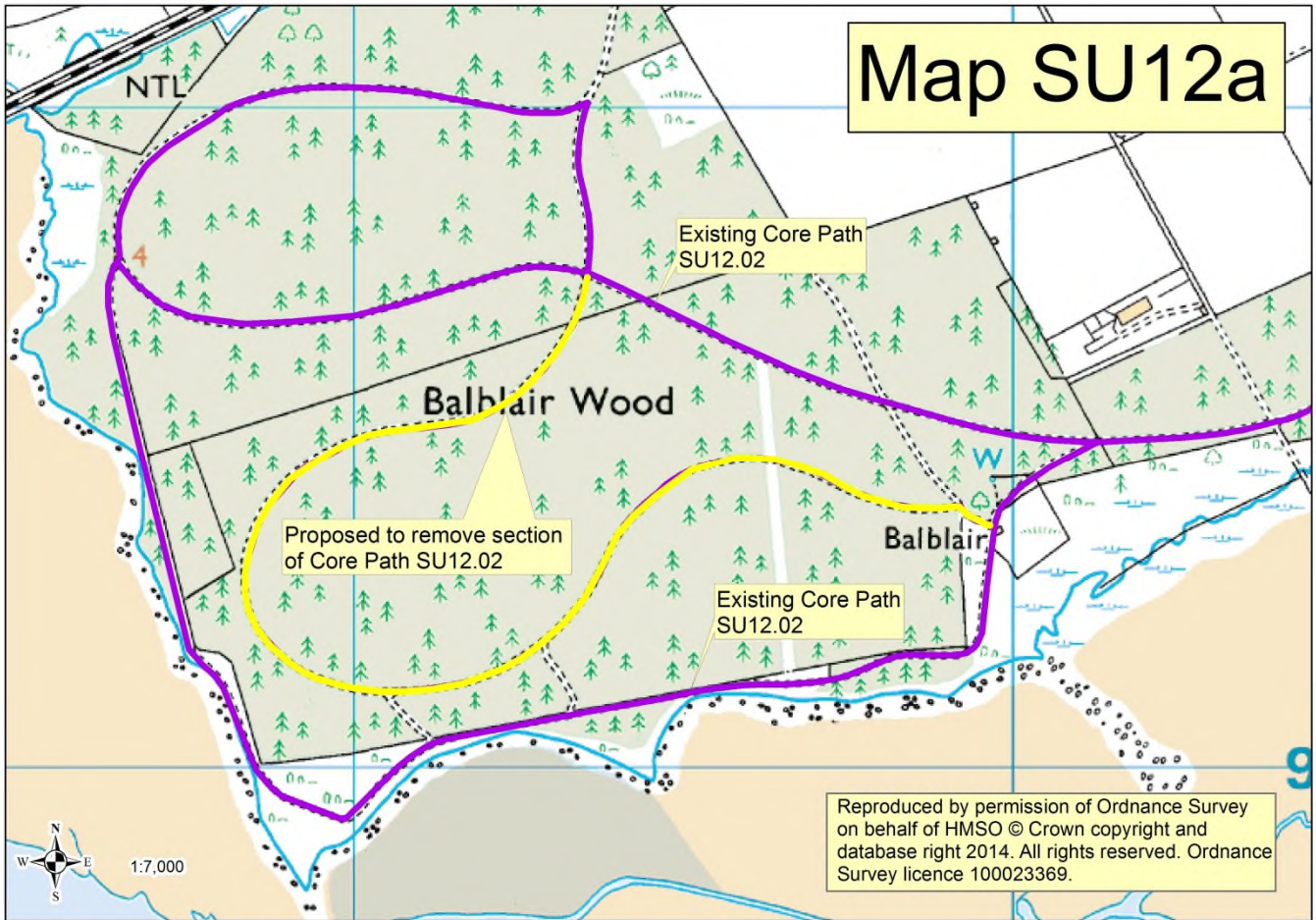
From previous community and local authority involvement there is a extensive network of paths in the area with both coastal and forest/woodland walks featuring strongly, the Big Burn walk is particularly well known as is Ben Bhraggie above Golspie.

Given the extent of the existing core paths plan there is not expected to be significant changes in this review for the Golspie area. One proposed change is to the extent of the routes adopted as core paths within the Balblair Wood by Loch Fleet. The routes provide access to an area that is a National Nature Reserve and the coastal route is well used and facilities are been improved on a regular basis. However the interior of the wood is not managed as extensively for recreation and some sections of the core paths are not accessible due to gorse encroachment. Whilst many of the route have been there are sections that are persistently impassable. It is proposed to remove one of the interior loops at Balblair Wood that is currently not accessible.

One possible new core path route in the area is that to Loch Lunndaidh, which sits below the west flank of Ben Bhraggie. The route is promoted in the local walks booklet and there are nearby sites of archaeological interest.

The rail line level crossing by Dunrobin Station was proposed as a core path during the previous core path plan consultation. The route was objected to by Network Rail and whilst the objection was not upheld by the reporter during the PLI, Ministers removed the route from the plan to be adopted by the council. Further to the PLI and the core path plan been adopted a Scottish Law Commission review has been published with regards level crossings. It makes clear that access rights exist over a private level crossing should it be identified as a core path. The proposal in this review is to reassert the route across the Dunrobin level crossing as a core path.

- Propose to remove part of existing core path SU12.02 as shown in Map SU12a.
- Propose core path SU12.24(P) to Loch Lunndaidh, see Map SU12b.
- Propose the Dunrobin level crossing as a core path to link existing core paths SU12.09 and SU12.11.



Helmsdale (SU13)

Helmsdale is a large settlement primarily on the east coast but extending inland to Kildonan and Borrobol. It borders the country of Caithness and as with other coastal towns in the region is passed by the A9 trunk road and Far North Railway Line

The current core paths plan focuses around Helmsdale village and towards Gartymore and Portgower to the south. From the desk top survey there are some changes and modifications to the core paths plan around Helmsdale itself but within the interior of the area there is a lack of obvious proposals, a few are described below in order to assess public feedback.

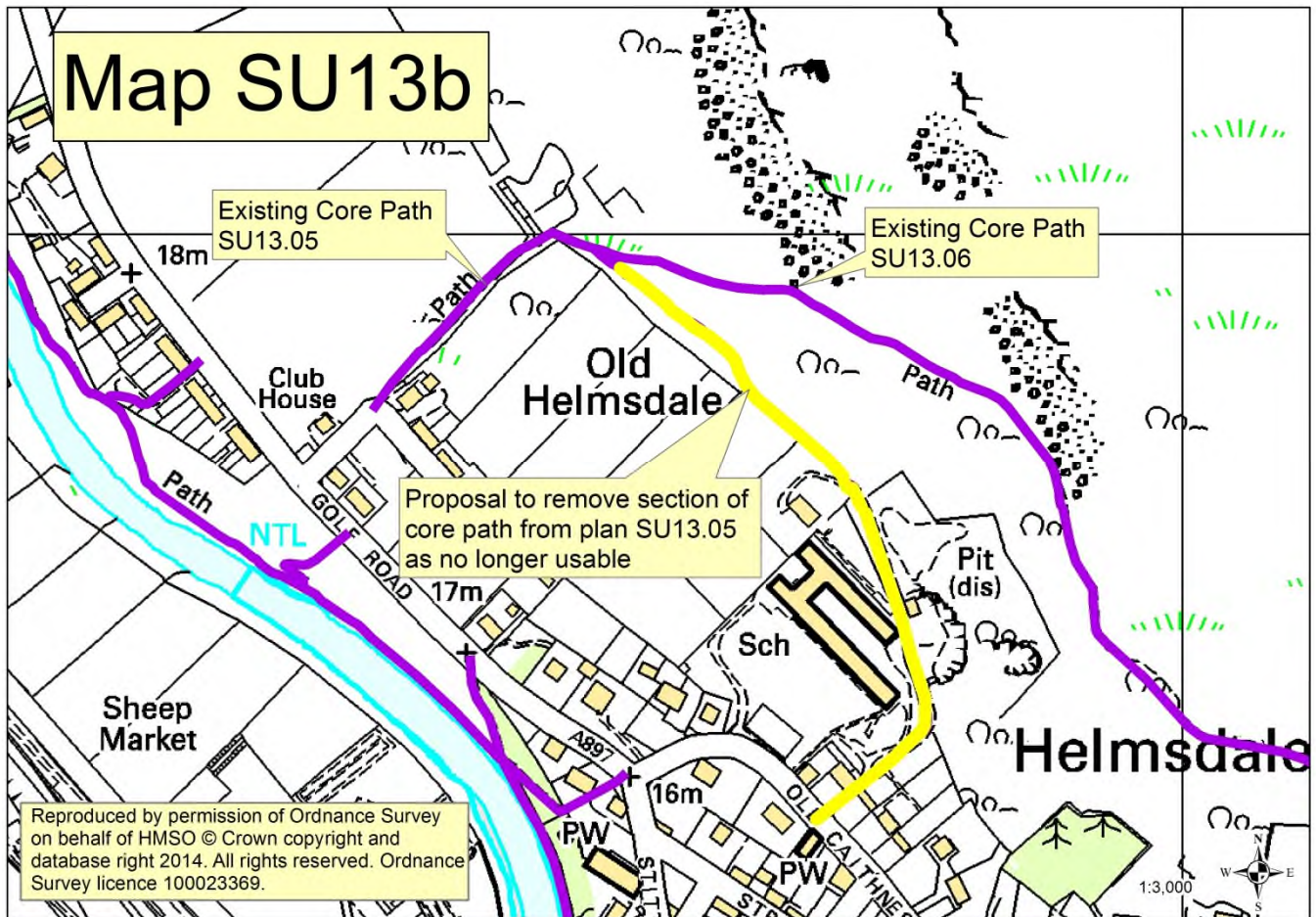
Since the previous plan was produced the A9 trunk road has been realigned from Navidale to the south of the Ord of Caithness. The old A9 road, from the snowgates at Navidale till the route meet the A9 just to the east of Eastern Allt Briste burn, has been retained as an adopted road and is classed as a cycle path. It is proposed to include the route as a core path. During the planning of the road realignment a public right of way was recorded from Navidale Farm north to the Navidale snowgate, roughly following the route of another Allt Briste burn. Effort was made to retain the route as it was bisected by the new road. It proposed to investigate this route for inclusion in the core path plan, though it is not known if the route is passible due to gorse encroachment.

In the village of Helmsdale itself there is a core path from by the golf course at Old Helmsdale leading to the Old Caithness Road, SU13.05. The start at either is perfectly fine but the middle section is no longer passable due to gorse encroachment. The golf course access also provides access to the hill route to East Helmsdale so should be retained but the remainder of the route is proposed to be removed from the core paths plan.

There are routes that are usable by the public for recreational means in the wider Helmsdale area but for the most part the routes do not provide access to an obvious place of interest or have limited public use at present. Some of the routes are listed below, if any public demand is shown for these then the routes will be further investigated.

- Propose to include route from Navidale snowgate to Allt Briste by A9(T) road as core path, SU13.09(P), see Map SU13a
- Propose to remove section of existing core path SU13.05, see Map SU13b

- Propose to investigate route from Navidale snowgate to Naividale Farm as core path, SU13.10(P), see Map SU13a
- Propose to investigate tracks and path to Craggie by the Craggie Burn from Kildonan
- Propose to investigate forest circuit at Kilearnan Hill/Torrish Woodland by Glen Loth
- Propose to investigate Baile an Or, a well know attraction but with limited routes visible on the ground.
- Propose to investigate track to Creag Thoraraidh mast above Navidale. A fairly strenuous route up the track but limited public recreational use?
- Propose to investigate the various peat roads, tracks up from Gartymore, visible routes but no obvious finish points



Kinbrace (SU14)

Kinbrace is a very large rural settlement in the centre of Sutherland. It is very sparsely populated with few roads and, other than Kinbrace itself, no centres of habitation. There are currently no core paths in the settlement.

Due to the limited habited areas and wide expansive peat terrain there are very few obvious routes in the settlement area for consideration in this core path plan review. There is one longer distance route that would provide a strategic link to the south west of the settlement. This route is the public right of way from Badenloch to Loch Choire than over Bealach Easach to the A836 by the Crask Inn. The condition of the route, principally between the Crask and Bealach Easach is unknown and would require further investigation.

- To investigate the Badenloch - Loch Choire - Bealach Easach - Crask public right of way for possible inclusion in the core paths plan.

Kinlochbervie (SU15)

Kinlochbervie is a small settlement zone on the west of Sutherland, the main village is at the large commercial harbour by Kinlochbervie itself. There are a string of crofting townships from Rhiconich through Archiesgill & Badcall to the south west of Kinlochbervie and also to the north east through Oldshoremore, Blairmore to Sheigra.

The settlement contains the Sandwood Estate, which is managed by the John Muir Trust, the track to Sandwood Bay is an existing core path and is one of the most frequented longer routes on the west coast of Sutherland, if not Highland. Sandwood Bay is a well known feature and is a destination for tourists from a considerable distance. Other than the relatively remote Sandwood Bay the area also contains stunning beaches and bays at Oldshoremore, Oldshore Beg/Pollin and Sheigra. Each of these beach accesses is part of the existing core paths plan.

Apart from a small number of other tracks and paths which are already core paths, the possible scope of routes for further inclusion in the core paths plan is limited. One possible route is that already shown on OS mapping from Achriesgill East to Clach a'Bhoineid on the A838 road to Durness. This route is of historic interest, though for the most part it is not a constructed path and is not positively defined on the ground, there is also the Achriesgill Water which though not a substantial water course is only crossed by boulder hopping on large stepping stones. This route is the most likely in the settlement to be considered as a new core path but further survey work is required to assess its suitability.

A further three routes have been highlighted to the council in the past and it is proposed to investigate these at present. These are the path to The Rhue/Ministers Point from the harbour area, the path from Rhivichie to Kinsaile and a link up of tracks from the Sheilings Peat Road (SU15.06) to Loch Innis (SU15.05). These routes are not constructed paths and it is possible it is not desirable to promote them in their present condition. However it is proposed to investigate these routes and, with the Ministers Point in particular, assess likely community involvement in improving them for future promotion.

- To investigate and survey the Archiesgill East to Clach a'Bhoineid path for possible inclusion in the core paths plan.
- To investigate the routes at Rhivichie to Kinsaile, The Rhue/Ministers Point and the Sheilings Peat Road to Loch Innis.

Lairg (SU16)

Lairg is a large settlement in the centre of Sutherland, it is traditionally a transport hub with several roads meeting in the village of Lairg and also the Far North Railway line having a station just to the south of Lairg. The land use in the area is mixed from traditional land holdings, to farmed/crofted land and commercial forestry.

The existing core paths plan focusses on routes in and around the village of Lairg with no routes in the wider settlement area. Some longer distance routes that link with adjacent settlements have previously been highlighted in this report such as the Crask – Badanloch and the Sleastary – Achinduich routes.

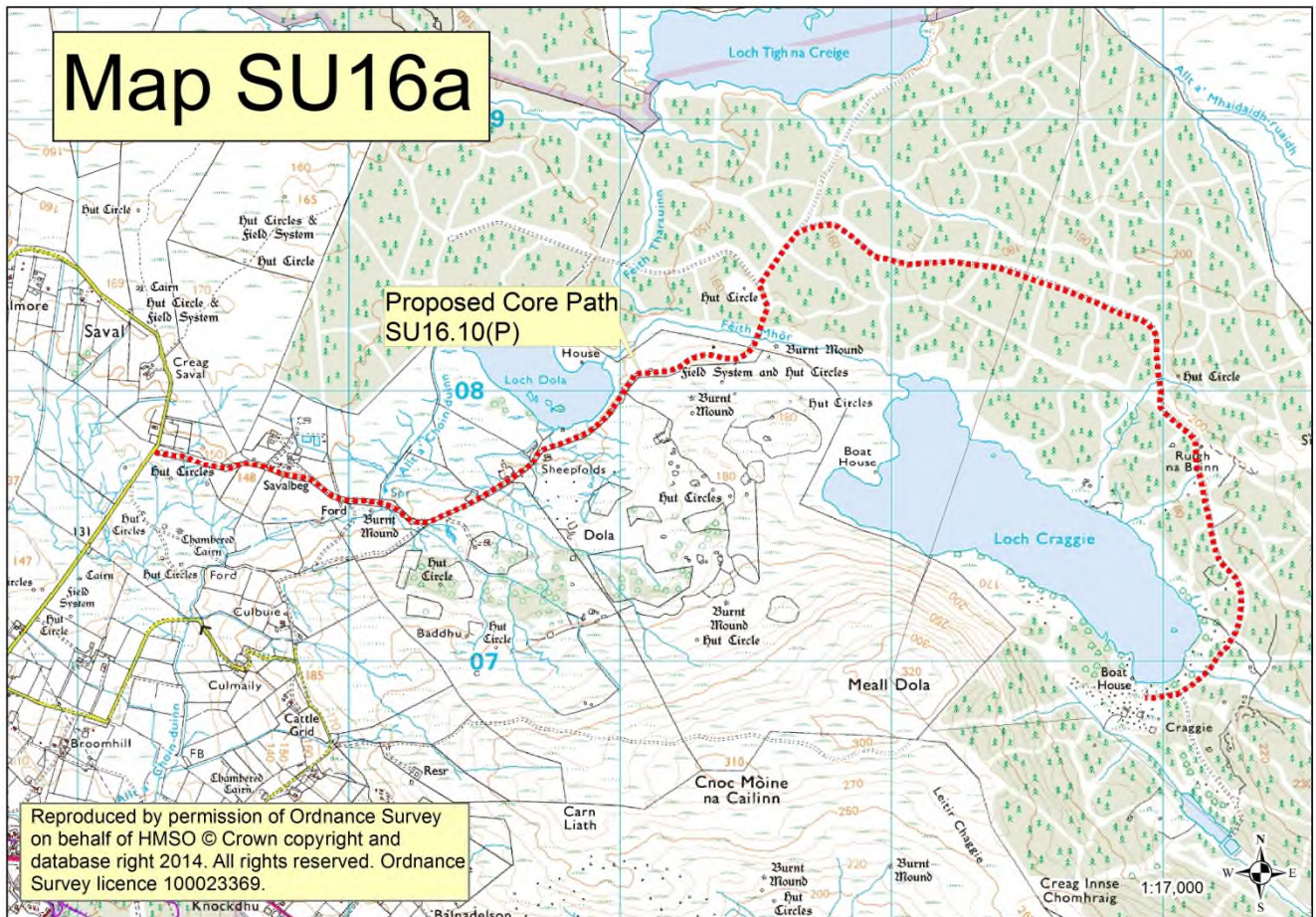
To the north of Lairg is the small crofting township of Saval, there are a number of historic and modern tracks that provide recreational access opportunities. The best known of these is the use of forest tracks to access Loch Craggie, there is no circular or through route but it does provide access to a place of recreational interest. The second of the routes is less well know and is likely used more for land management operations than recreational access, it is the route from the road end at Savalmore through Dalchork Forest to the A836.

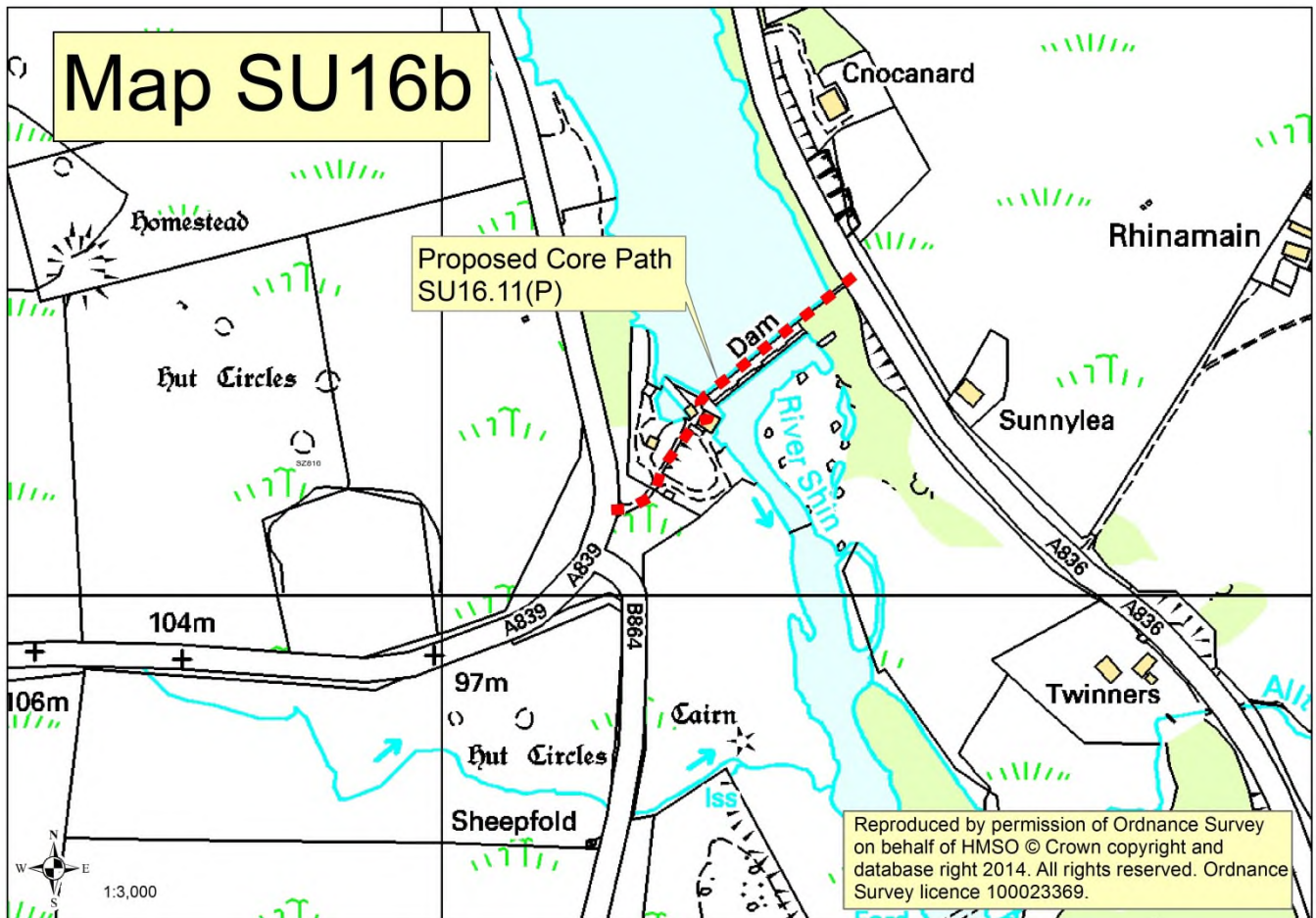
To the south of Lairg there is the lower of the Loch Shin dams, Little Loch Shin Dam, it has pedestrian passage over the dam – possibly as a consequence of the loss of a nearby footbridge when the area was flooded. Access rights exist over the structure and it is proposed to include the route as a core path.

One other remaining longer distance route to consider is that in the north of the settlement starting from Corriekinloch over Maovally towards Glen Cassley and Dunchally.

- Propose to include the track from Saval to Loch Craggie as a core path, SU16.10(P), see Map SU16a.
- Propose to include the route across the Lower Loch Shin Dam as a core path, SU16.11(P), see Map SU16b.

- To investigate the route from Saval to the A836 through Dalchork Forest as a core path.
- To investigate the route from Corriekinloch to Glen Cassley as a core path.





Loch Assynt (SU17)

Loch Assynt is a large rural settlement on the west side of Sutherland, it does not have a coastline and is predominately mountainous in character. It starts in the south at Elphin, the main settlement in the area, heading north through Ledmore Junction and Inchadamph to Quinag in the North and Brackloch in the West on the outskirts of Lochinver.

The current core paths are on the limited number of built paths in the area. At the time there was limited other recreational access opportunities away from the hill walking routes. Since the previous plan was developed a route from the A894 towards Quinag has been improved by the land owner. Whilst the full onwards route to the hill is outside the scope of this core path review it is considered the constructed path to the Lochan Bealach Cornaidh should be proposed as a core path.

The promoted routes at Leitir Easaidh and Little Assynt have been extended since the previous core path plan was developed. A new circular route extends north west from the current core path at Little Assynt to old shielings and Loch an t-Sabhail. Another circuit, Kens Path, heads off this path to provide views North West over the Assynt peninsula.

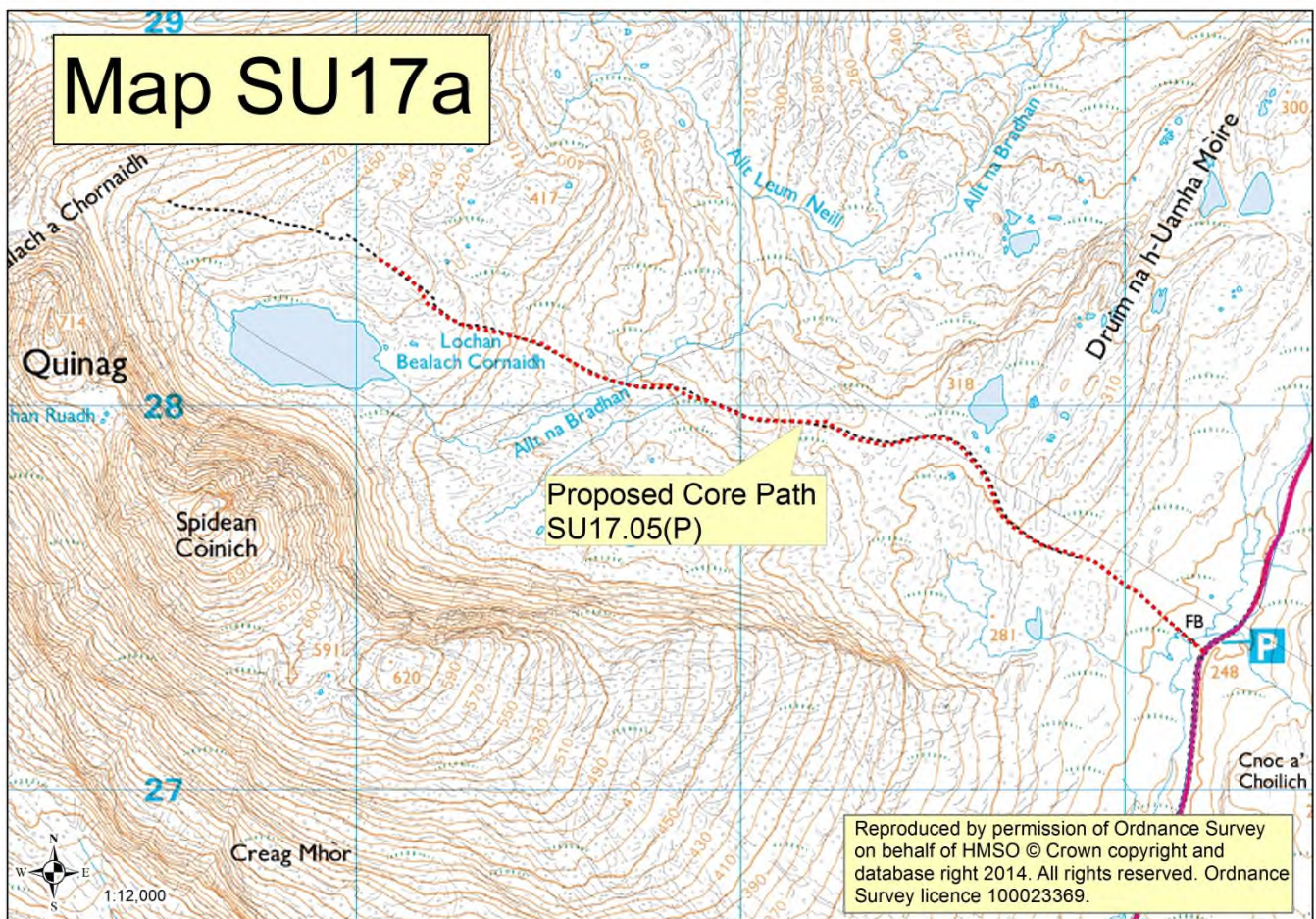
On the shore of Loch Assynt is a well visited tourist site to Ardvreck Castle, along with a route to the nearby Calda House. Both of these site has routes formed to them and it is proposed to include the route in the core paths plan.

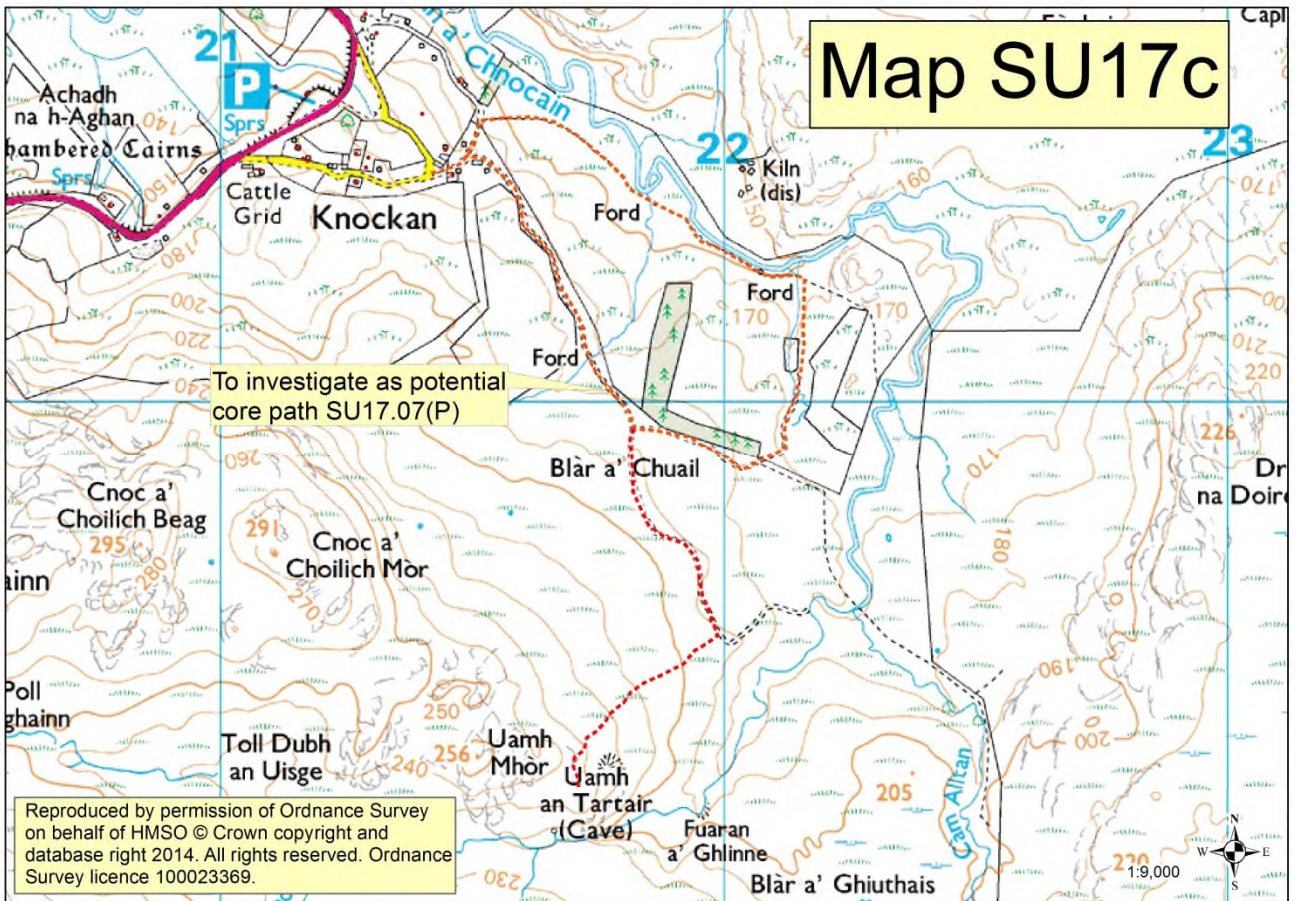
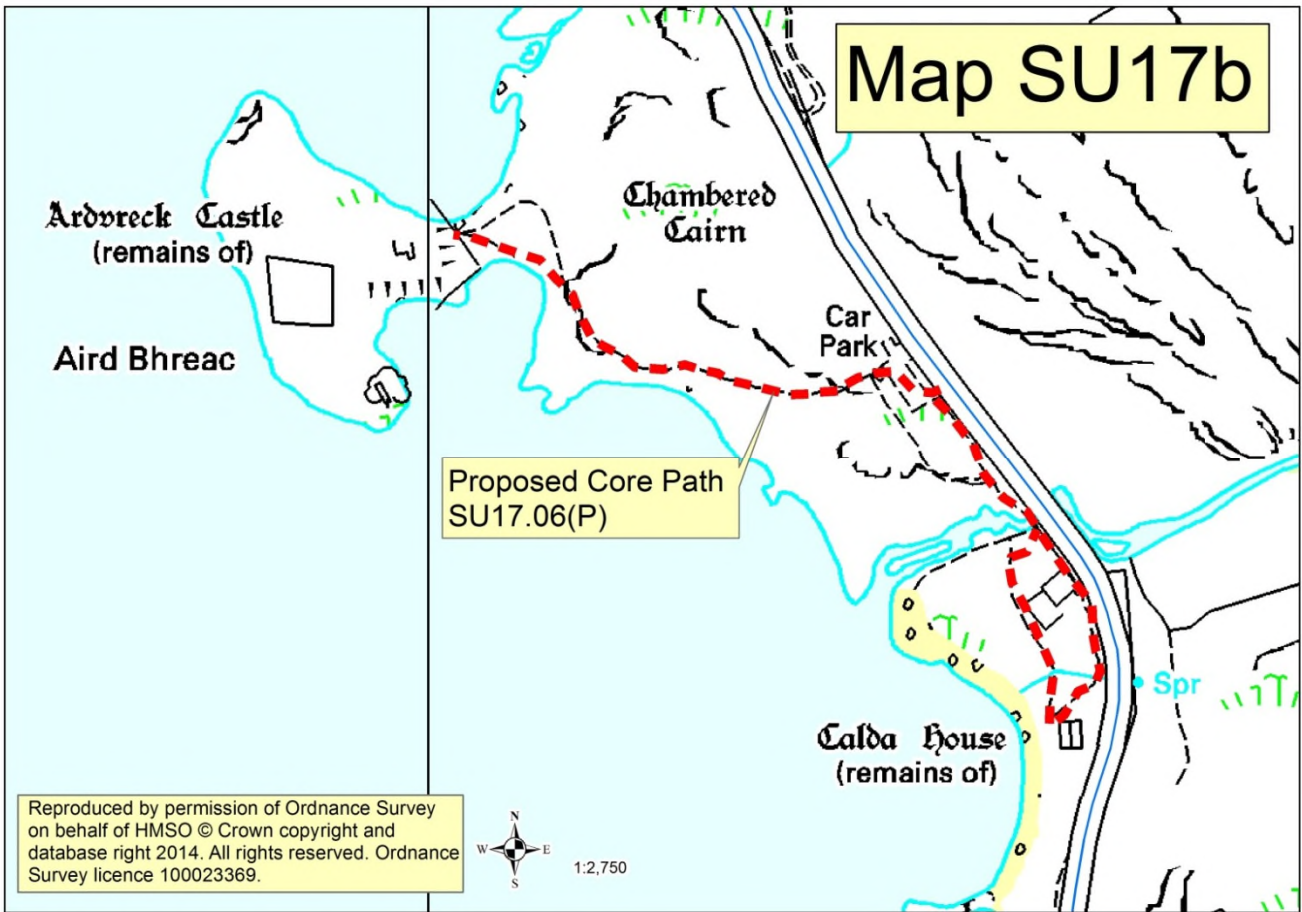
At Elphin there are currently no core paths, there are caves at Uamh an Tartair which can be reached on a track and then rough route from the Knockan road loop. There is also an informal loop along the Abhainn a'Chnocain burn. Whilst these routes are partly on tracks and made paths there are section of made through use path, it is proposed to investigate these route as potential core paths..

One longer distance route frequently mentioned to the council is that from just north of Elphin, past Cam Loch through Gleann Dorcha to Glencanisp. This route is challenging to the user with a deal of rough walking as the path is poor in places. In poor weather navigation skills may also be required as well as fitness.

- Propose route from A894 to Lochan Bealach Cornaidh as a core path, SU17.05(P), see Map SU17a.
- Propose new routes at Little Assynt towards Loch an t-Sabahail and Kens Path as core paths.
- Proposed route to Ardvreck Castle and Calda House as core path, SU17.06(P), see Map SU17b.

- To investigate the route from Elphin to Glencanisp for suitability for inclusion as a core path.
- To investigate the routes to the Tamh an Tartair caves and Abhainn a'Chnocain burn from Knockan as core paths, SU17.07(P), see map SU17c.





Lochinver (SU18)

Lochinver is a coastal settlement in the south west corner of Sutherland, along with the main village at Lochinver there are other centres of population at Clachtoll, Achmelvich and Inverkirkaig. The current core paths plan uses a network of historic routes well used and promoted for public recreational use. This review will focus on a small number of changes to the existing core paths and some new short routes to places of interest. Many of the potential core paths are routes formed through use, so they will need to be investigated to check their suitability for inclusion in the core paths plan.

In Clachtoll the main tourist draw is the beach which is accessed over boardwalks from a council car park, the other obvious draw to the public is the Split Rock, ~500m south of the Bay of Clachtoll. This is a well visited site though the route to it is not clearly formed on the ground. There has been more fencing installed and this may have channelled people onto a more formed route. It is proposed to investigate the route to the Split Rock and assess if a used route can be identified on the ground. Another place of interest in Clachtoll is a broch to the north of the bay, ~800m. As with the Split Rock route there is little obvious route on the ground for much of the way, whilst the Split Rock route crosses short cropped grassy dunes, the broch route passes over rougher terrain. It is proposed to investigate the route to the broch as a potential core path.

To the west of Achmelvich Bay is a folly known as the Hermits Castle, it is accessed by a route formed through use over rough ground. It is proposed to investigate the route to the Hermits Castle as a potential core path.

- To investigate the route from Clachtoll to the Split Rock as a core path.
- To investigate the route from Clachtoll to the broch north of the bay as a core path and also the approach from the Bay of Stoer
- To investigate the route from Achmelvich Bay to the Hermits Castle as a core path.

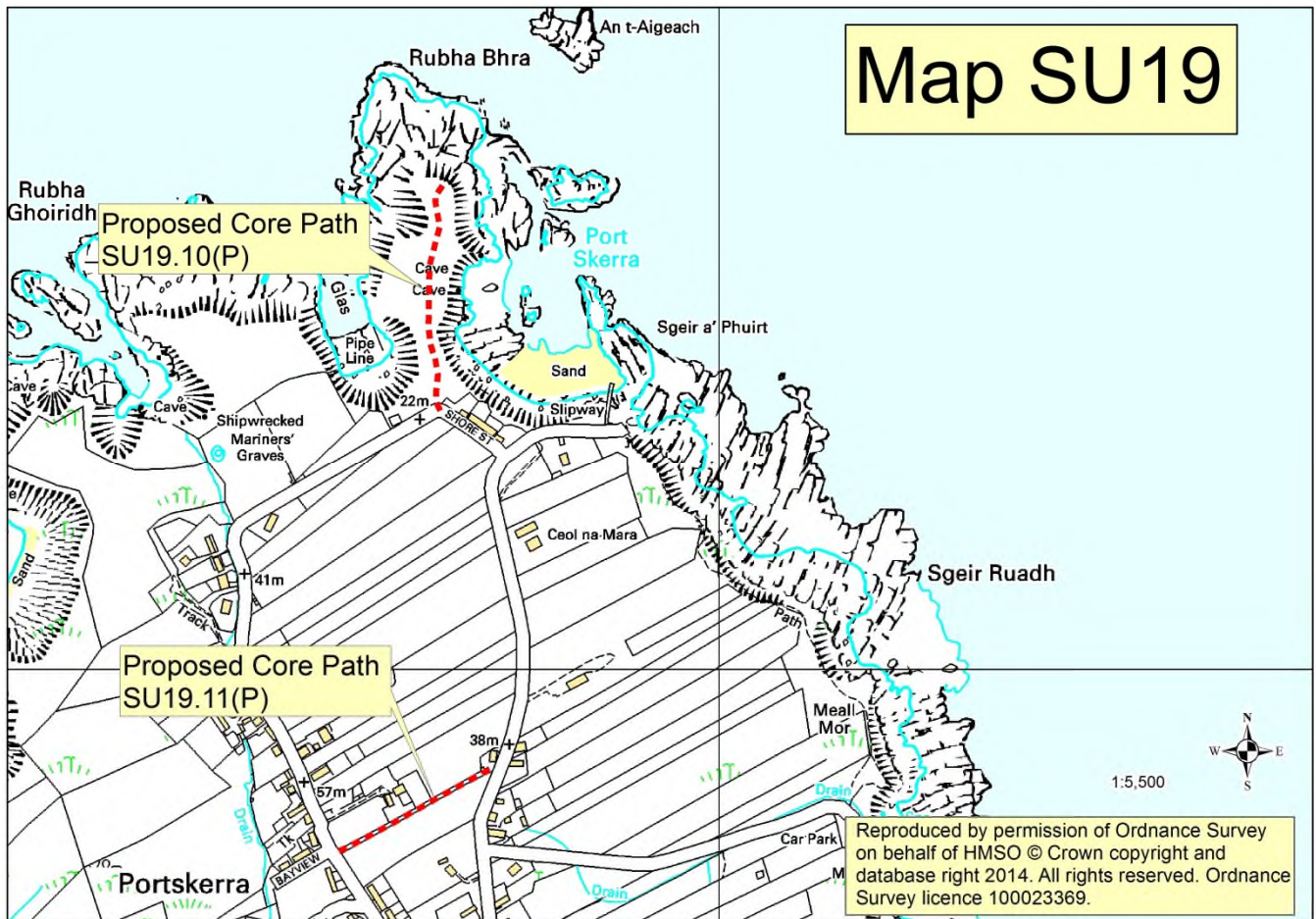
Melvich (SU19)

Melvich is a large settlement on the north coast of Sutherland, it is defined in part by the passage of the north coast A836 road where most of the population is based and also the passage of the A897 along Strath Halladale which is further populated. The remainder of the settlement is remote peatland and commercial forestry. The settlement covers along the north coast from Melvich/Portskerra to Aultiphurst and to Forsinard in Strath Halladale to the south.

At Portskerra there are two routes which have been raised in past discussions with the local community, the main one been a link track from the top public road in the village to the lower public road, by the dwelling known as Windyknowe. Some minor works are required to bring the route up a suitable standard for a core path but these are anticipated to be easily achievable given the historic nature of the track and the support received from the grazing clerk to improve the route. Another route in the village is a track formed through use to Rhuba Bra on the coast. Proposed to include both routes as core paths.

At Forsinain there is the start of the existing core path SU19.02 to Sletill Hill, since the previous plan was developed a new trails has been created around the Forsinain forest block just to the north. It is proposed to include this trail in to the core paths plan.

- Propose routes by Windyknowe and to Rhuba Bra as core paths, SU19.10(P) and SU19.11(P), see Map SU19.
- Propose the Forsinain Trail as a core path.



Rogart (SU20)

Rogart is a rural settlement in east Sutherland though it does not have a coastline. The main settlements are along Strath Fleet comprising a number of spread out townships with the main one been Pittentrail. A road leads from Pittentrail out of the Strath to further townships and the road then leads down into Strath Brora. The north west of the settlement is a remote expanse of peat and rough hill ground.

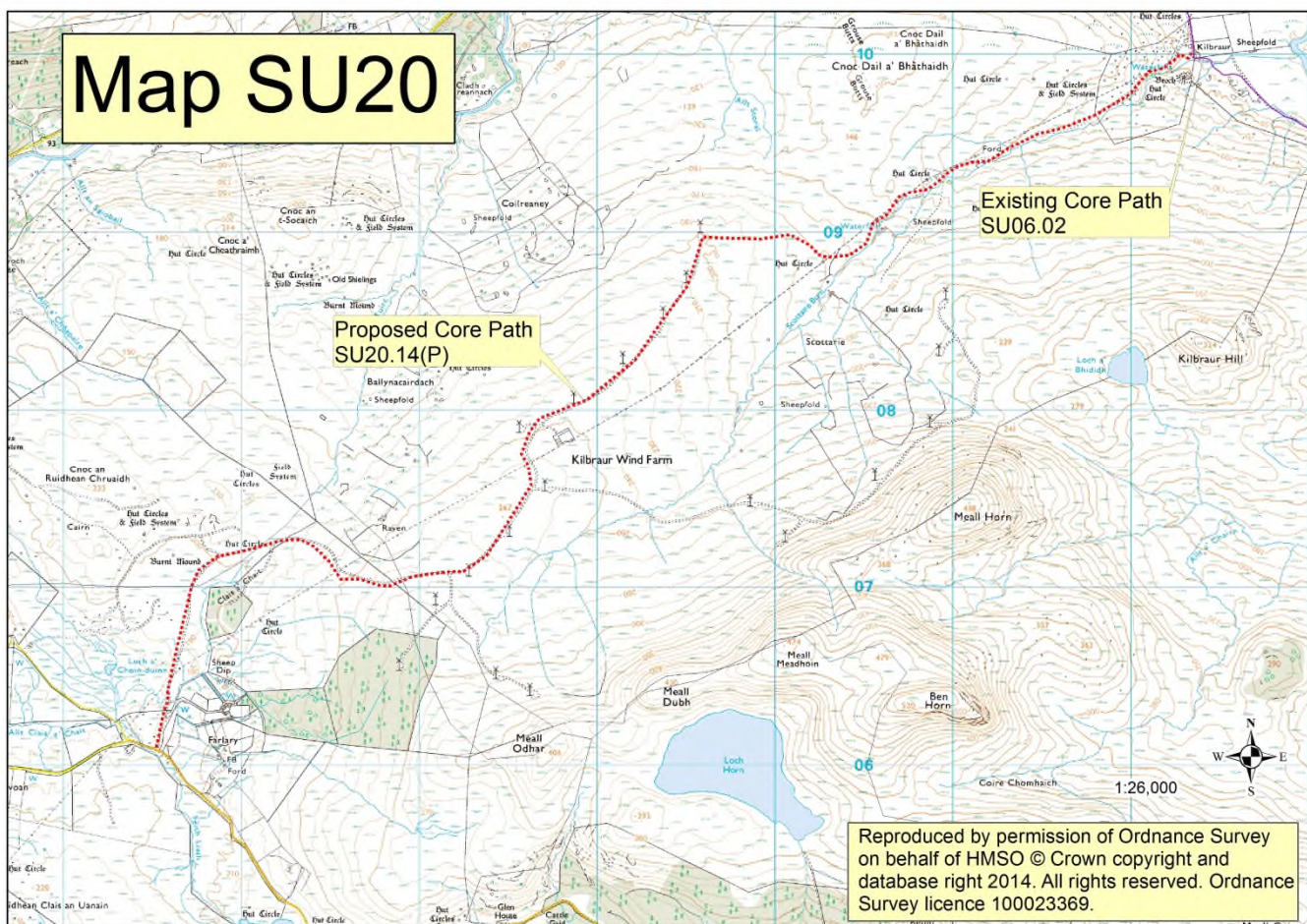
The current core paths plan covers a good range of routes over mainly crofted ground. There are many other routes in the area that allow recreational access but the public need for extensive distances of new core paths is limited in an area that has low visitor presence. A number of routes have been improved around the forestry block above Rovie.

One existing core path raised with the council is the Meall Mor Fire Track, SU20.01. This route provides a high level route above Strath Fleet, it was a track built hastily many decades ago to provide access to the adjacent forest to tackle a fire outbreak. Apart from concerns over the route been a core path from the land managers there are some poor sections which are not easily passed as would be expected on a core path. It has been suggested that start of the route from the public road could be modified to use an older peat track at Inchcape, this is a much better standard than the uphill section of the fire track. The only down side is that the peat road does not link in directly with the remaining Meall Mor Fire Track core path. Improved way marking and minor improvements to the existing core path may be less effort than creating a new section of path, it is proposed to investigate the options at this location as part of this review.

The Kilbraur wind farm is partly within the Rogart settlement and has been constructed since the previous core path planning consultations. The initial wind farm tracks provided limited recreational opportunity but with more recent extensions, and nearby work on the electricity transmission line, a track now links from Farlary by Knockarthur to Kilbraur in Strath Brora. This is a unique feature of wind farm development in the area and the link created between the two straths is an interesting feature which is proposed a core path.

- Propose the wind farm route from Farlary to Kilbraur as core path, SU20.14(P), see Map SU20.

- To investigate the existing core path SU20.01 to provide an improved route from the Inchcape public road to upper section of the route.



Rosehall (SU21)

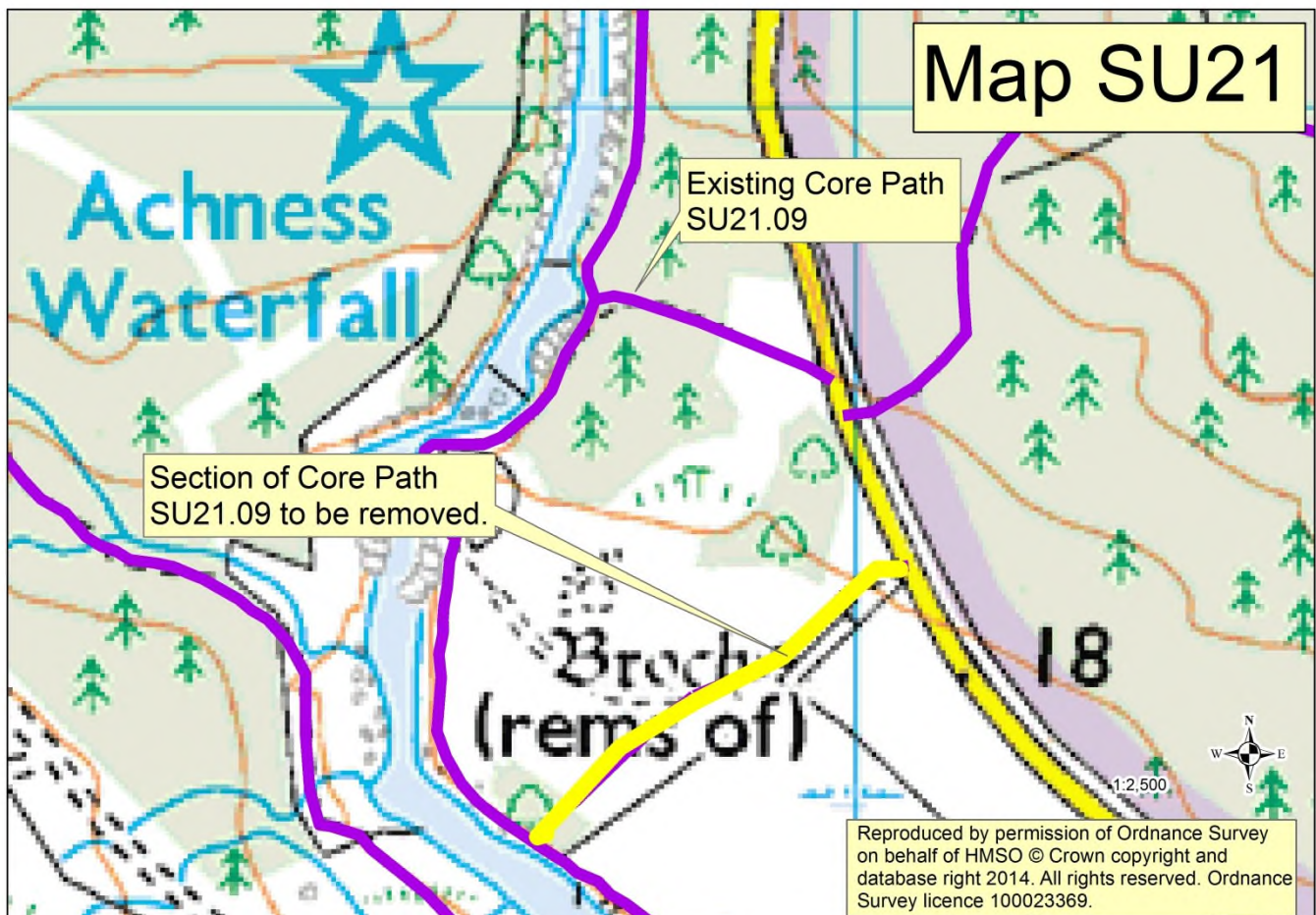
Rosehall is a rural settlement in southern central Sutherland, it is a large settlement stretching from Invershin in the east to the Munros Ben More Assynt in the north and Seanna Bhragh in the south. The main settlement is at Invercassley with other spread out dwellings mainly along the Kyle of Sutherland and Strath Okyel

There is a large amount of commercial forestry in the area and also several wind farms, these provide tracks for recreational access opportunities but their recreational value is limited given they lack routes to places of interest or circuits. One longer distance route from Glen Cassley to Corriekinloch is highlighted in a previous section of this report.

Other routes offering recreational opportunities to places of interest, link paths or of amenity value are limited, luckily the main settlement at Invercassley is well provisioned with routes. Community and agency involvement in the past has produced a path network in Rosehall Wood. One minor change is proposed at Achness Falls, as two adjacent routes to the river bank were included in the previous core path plan, there are a further two routes promoted in the core path plan. It is proposed to remove one of the two adjacent routes, the one to be removed is used by vehicle and other land management uses.

There is a forest circuit at Clais Mor to the west of the settlement, by Oykel Bridge. The use of this area for recreational access is limited and whilst the forest track is circular the council is not satisfied that sufficient use is made of it to merit it been a core path.

- Propose to modify the existing core path SU21.09 as Map SU21.



Scourie (SU22)

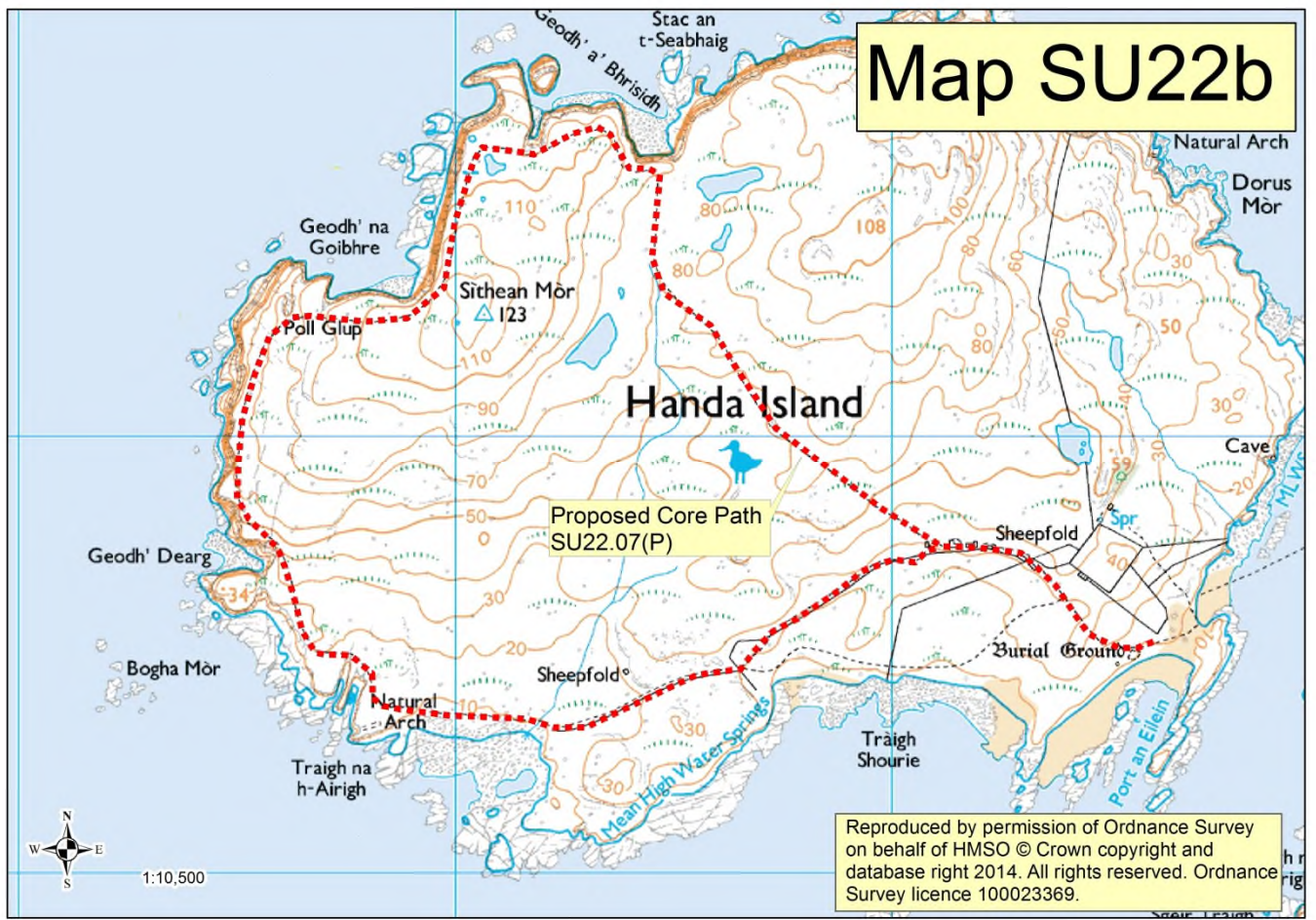
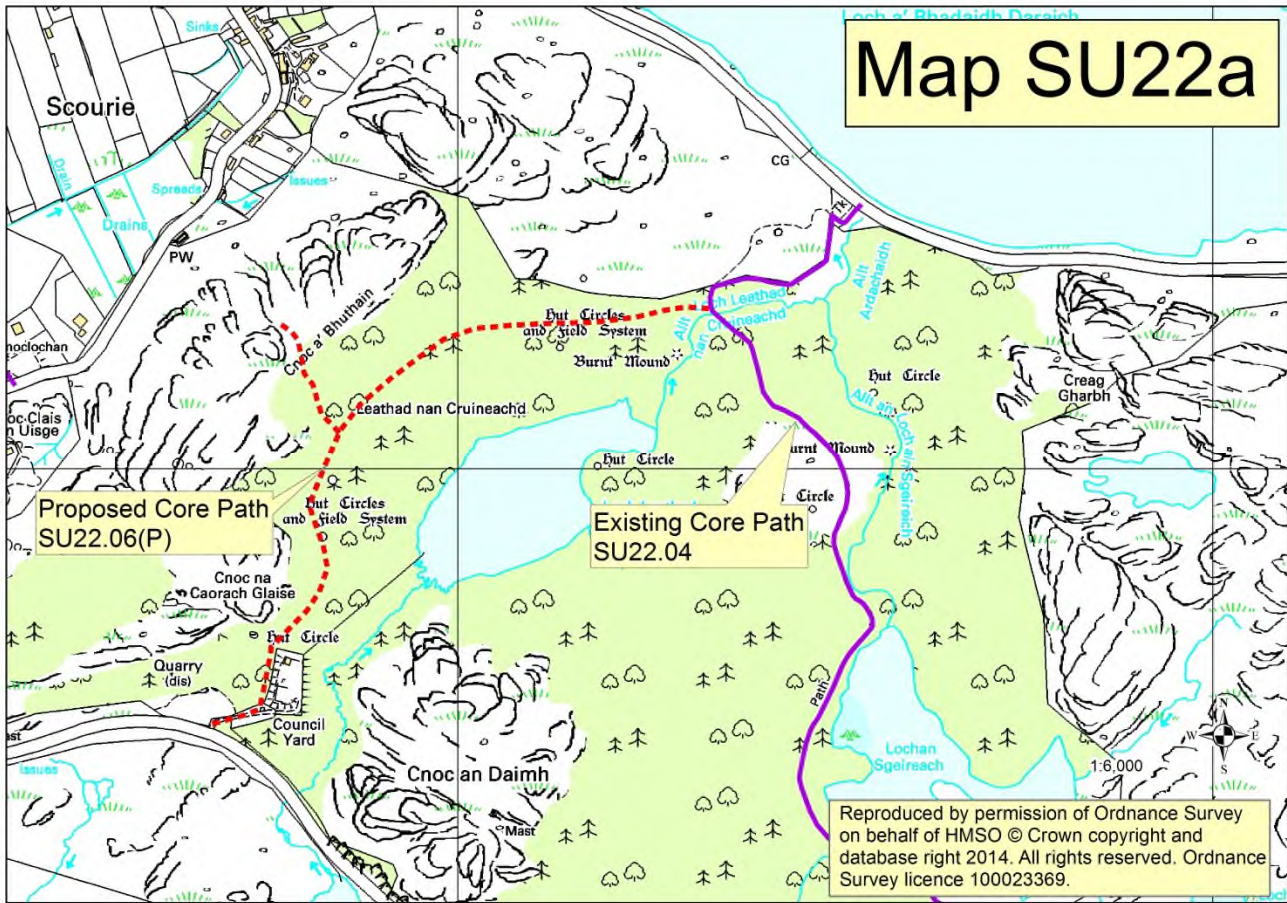
Scourie is small, mainly crofted, settlement on the west coast of Sutherland. It extends from Duartmore to Laxford Bay, the main village is Scourie itself but there are spread out townships to the north of the settlement at Tarbet, Foindle & Fanagmore and also at Bacall to the south.

The core paths path is focused around the village at Scourie. There is an existing route that leads from Scourie to Tarbet, it is a well known historic route but for the most part there is no constructed path. There are some concerns over the condition of the route, and the ease of users finding their way, for its suitability as a core path. There is the possibility of increased way marking on the route but this would not address the condition underfoot. Given the popularity of the route to visitors the council does not consider it reasonable to remove the route from the core paths plan, the popularity of the route precedes the existing core paths plan, and removing the route may limit opportunities for council or local community improvements.

A new woodland planting scheme has taken place above Scourie and it is becoming established. An existing core path SU22.04 pass through the east of the new woodland but a new path has been constructed through the west of the woodland with a side branch to a view point at Cnoc a'Bhuthain. It is proposed to include this new path as a core path.

An important attraction in this settlement is Handa Island which is just off the mainland near Tarbet. It is reached by boat from the harbour at Tarbet and the island is managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. There is a promoted path around the island which visitors are encouraged to use so that the birdlife, which is the main attraction, is not disturbed. It is proposed to include the path circuit around Handa Island as a core path.

- Propose the new path from the old council depot via Cnoc a'Bhuthain to the existing core path SU22.04 as a core path, SU22.06(P). See Map SU22a
- Propose the path around Handa Island as a core path, SU22.07(P), see Map SU22b



Stoer (SU23)

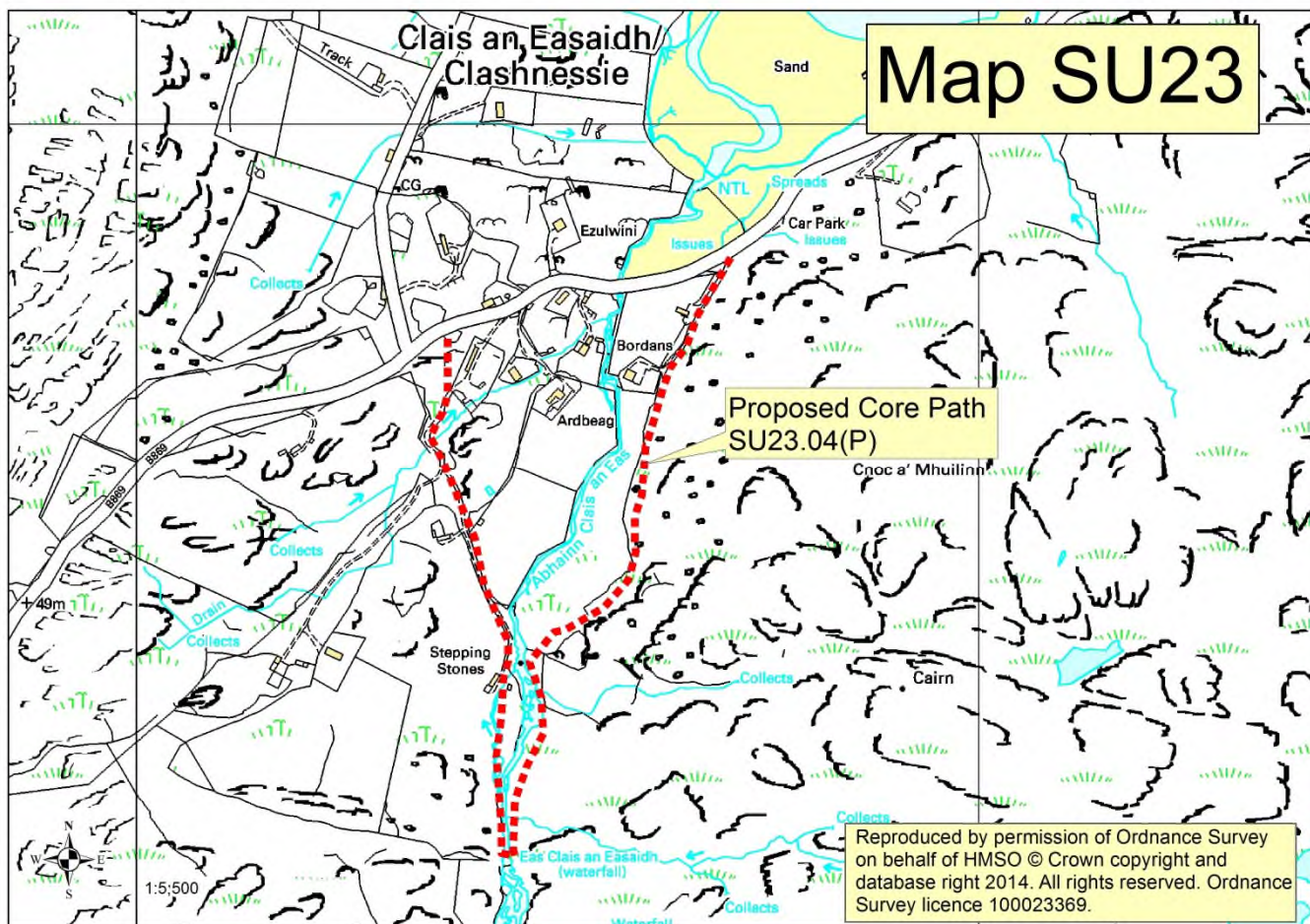
Stoer is a small crofted settlement on the North West tip of the Assynt peninsula. The main visitor attraction in the area is the Stoer Head Lighthouse and the coastal route to the Point of Stoer and the Old Man of Stoer sea stack. The route to the Point of Stoer is predominantly made through use and can be in poor condition underfoot due to poor drainage and lack of surfacing. However the route is generally easy to follow due to its cliff top nature. There are alternative route to and from the Point of Stoer, principally talking the summit of Sidhean Mòr/Sidhean Beag and then using constructed tracks to Stoer Head. These alternative route are not fully definable on the ground and it is felt they should not be core paths at this time.

One new route proposed as a core path is the circuit to the Clashnessie Falls. This is a well known and visited feature which is currently promoted from the Clashnessie beach car park and through local sign posting.

Another route of note is the coastal path from Culkein Pier to Rubha an Dunain, this is a constructed track and then a desire line. The peninsula has archaeological feature and also a natural arch. As the route is not evident on aerial photography it is proposed to investigate the route further before considering as a proposed core path.

- Propose the route to Clashnessie Falls as a core path, SU23.04(P), see Map SU23.

- Investigate the route from Culkein Pier to Runha An Dunain as a potential core path.



Tongue (SU24)

Tongue is settlement on the north coast of Sutherland, centred around the Kyle of Tongue. The main village is a Tongue but there are spread out townships around Melness and also at Coldbackie/Blandy. There is a good spread of core paths throughout the settlement. There are other routes in the settlement that would be suitable for public access but there are limit new opportunities for routes of recreational interest, link paths or of amenity value.

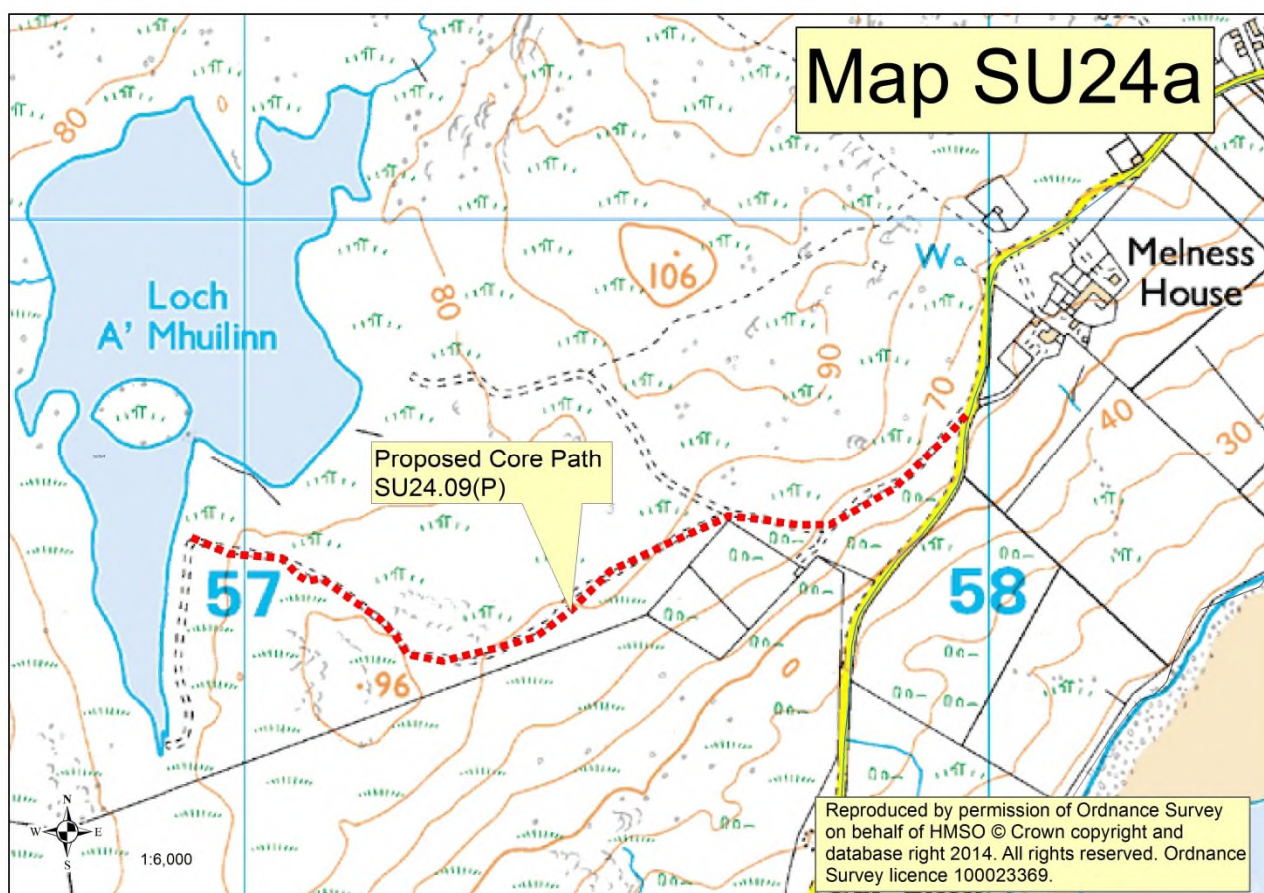
One route proposed is the route to Loch a’Mhuilinn, by Midtown, Melness as a core path, this is promoted locally and follows a constructed track. Another route is that to Coldbackie beach from the A836, this is a popular route with visitors s the beach is easily seen from the road and there is parking available at the roadside.

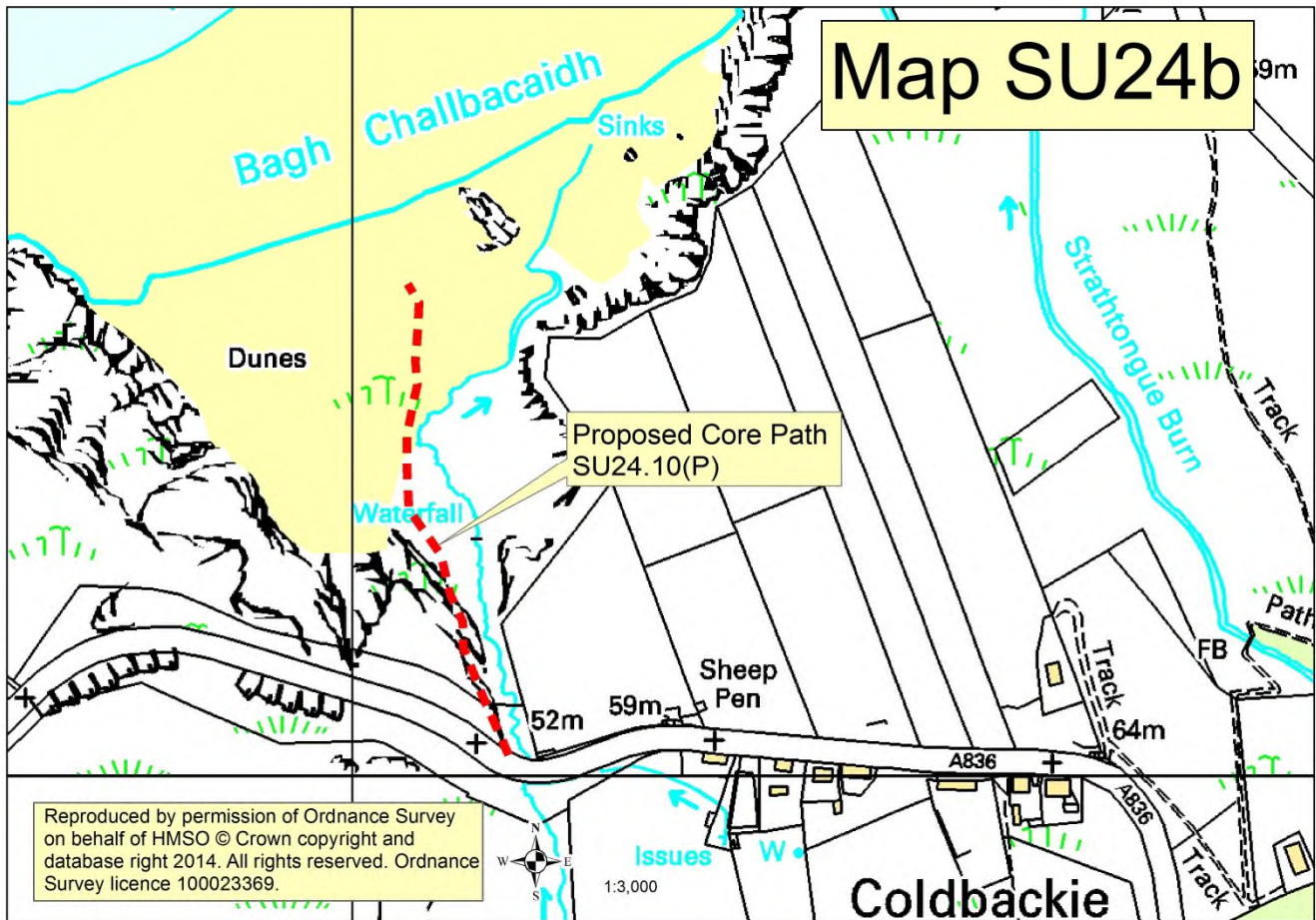
At Portvasgo, Melness there is an existing core path along the coast to Talmine, another route north from Portvasgo lead to the Stac Mor peninsula, this route is clear from aerial mapping for most of its length but the remainder is less clear. It is proposed to investigate the route as a potential core path.

The Moine path from the head of the Kyle of Durness, Kinloch has been mentioned for investigation elsewhere in this report.

- Propose the route to Loch a’Mhuilinn as a core path, SU24.09(P), see Map SU24a
- Propose the route from the A836 to Coldbackie Bay as a core path, SU24.10(P), see Map SU24b

- Investigate the route from Postvasgo to Stac Mor as a potential core path.





Unapool (SU25)

Unapool is a small rural settlement centred around the sea lochs of Glean Dubh and Glencoul. Unapool itself is a small township at the start of Loch Glencoul, the area is well known for the high span, curving road bridge linking Kylesku to Kylestrome.

The public right of way linking Kylestrome to Achfary is mentioned previously in this report. There are no other proposals for core paths or potential investigations. There are no other proposals for the Unapool settlement area.

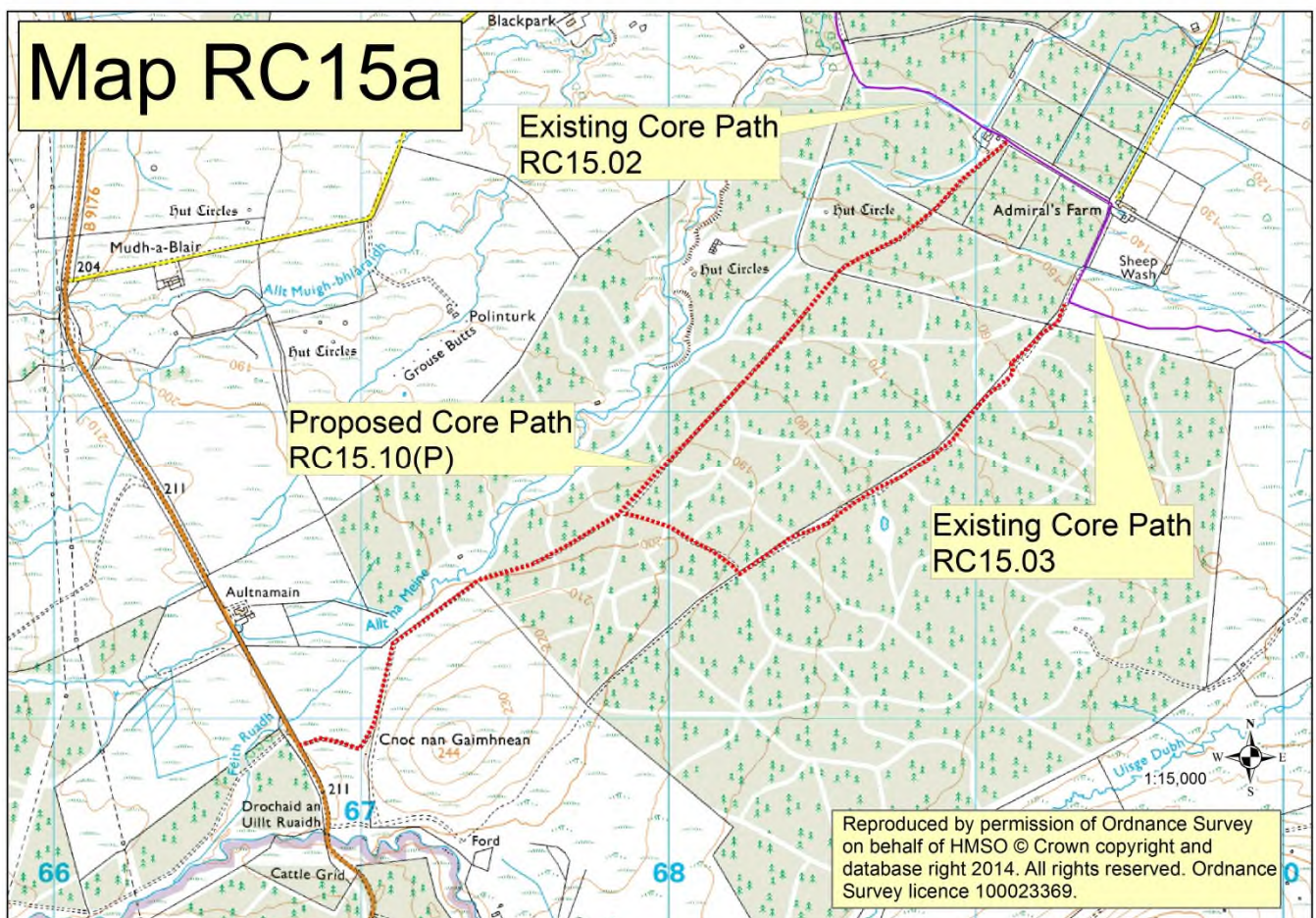
Edderton (RC15)

Edderton is a settlement zone in the country of Ross and Cromarty but for administration purposes is managed as part of the Sutherland. The area is on the south side of the Dornoch Firth and heads inland to just north of Strathroy and includes Struie Hill. There is a reasonable network of paths in and around the main village at Edderton, the remainder of the settlement at present has no core paths.

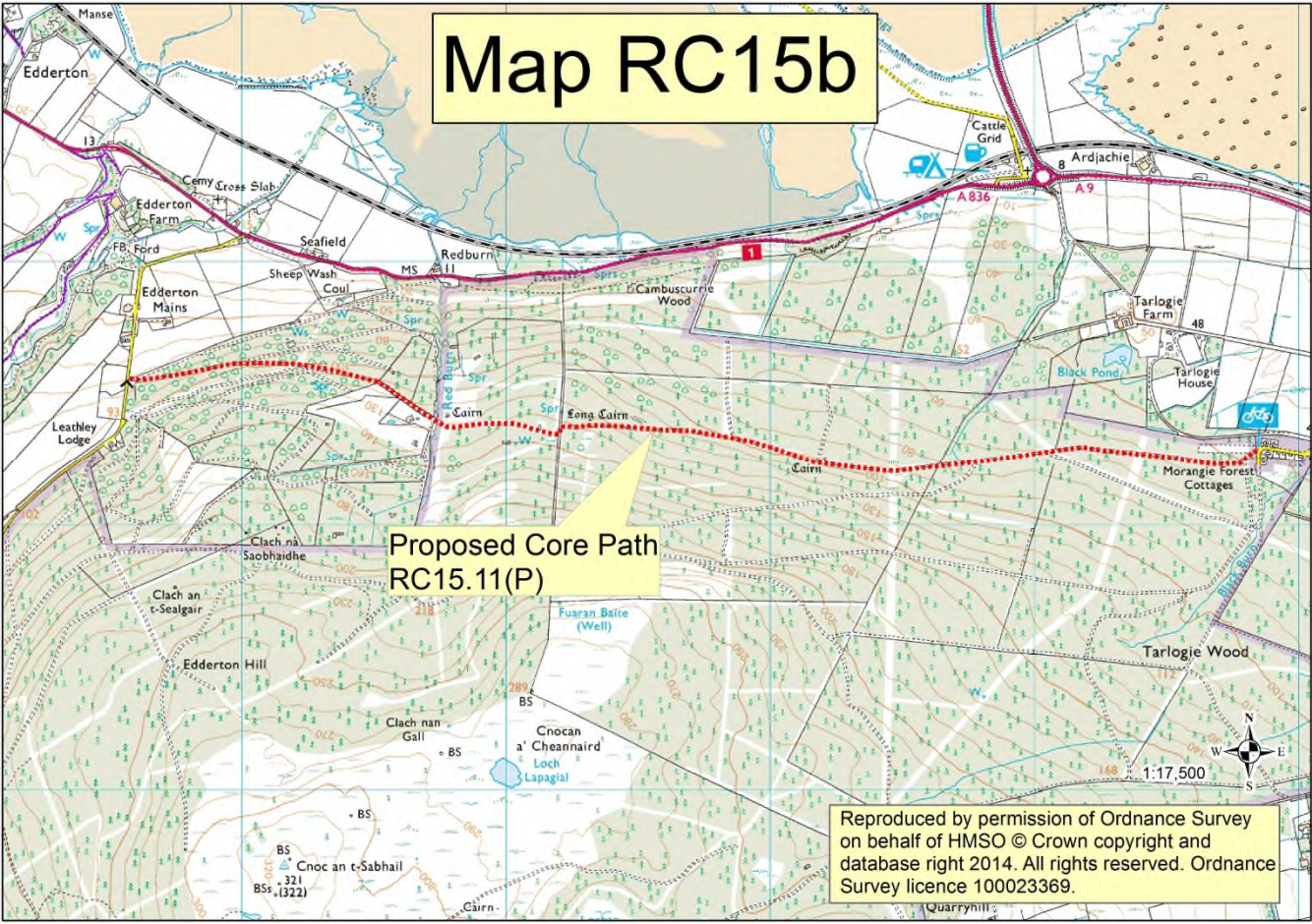
One possible new link is on existing forestry track is that from existing core paths by Admirals Farm towards the B9176 by Aultnamain. These forest tracks both provide a link within the settlement but also provide circular routes.

A further possible link path is a route from the Edderton Mains road to Tarlogie in the Tain settlement. The route is more or less all on forest tracks but there is a short section which is a route along a forest break (no built path or track) though it is easily passed along.

- Propose the track from existing core paths RC15.02 and RC15.03 towards the B9176 by Aultnamain as a core path, RC15.10(P). See Map RC15a.
- Propose the route from Edderton Mains road to Tarlogie as core path, RC15.11(P), see Map RC15b.



Map RC15b



Proposed Core Path
RC15.11(P)

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