

29th February 2024

Agenda Item No.

Fife Coast & Countryside Trust Annual Performance Report

Report by: Paul Vaughan, Head of Communities & Neighbourhoods

Wards Affected: All

Purpose

To present the annual performance report for Fife Coast and Countryside Trust (FCCT) for 2022/23.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to: - Consider and review the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust performance information.

Resource Implications

Increased demand on Fife's outdoors requires that further investment be considered if the benefits of high-quality accessible outdoor spaces are to be realised and Fife is to continue to provide well-managed sites to the benefit of local communities and visitors alike.

Legal & Risk Implications

There are risk implications highlighted in this report that pertain to the provision of service, and delivery of targets in alignment with the Council's obligation to improve local services and local outcomes whilst demonstrating best value.

Impact Assessment

An EqIA is not required because the report does not propose a change or revision to existing policies and practices.

Consultation

None required.

1.0 Background

Fife Coast and Countryside Trust (FCCT) is a charity that manages, maintains, and preserves wide areas of the countryside of Fife, promoting responsible access to our wonderful and diverse outdoor sites.

FCCT look after over 60 sites and path networks throughout Fife including the Fife Coastal Path, the Lomond Hills Regional Park, local nature reserves and other locations which are important for recreation and conservation.

2.0 Performance Reporting

2.1 Introduction

The dramatic changes in the world in recent years necessitated a dynamic approach to planning and delivery by FCCT, and this has served us well. FCCT's strategic objectives are to consolidate our activity, diversify our funding base, and specialise in what we offer Fife. These priorities provide high-level guidance that ties together all activity carried out by FCCT.

FCCT has intentionally avoided growth as a strategic aim as our view is that growth will happen in response to demand and should not be pursued as an end or viewed as a measure of success. Despite not aiming for growth, FCCT has nevertheless grown as pressure on our services has increased, and funding for our areas of specialism has become available.

Diversification, particularly in terms of our funding, is essential to ensuring that FCCT is resilient in the face of a rapidly changing world. Beyond funding, embracing diversity in our activities supports our values of being inclusive, fair, and respectful to all.

Our drive to specialise recognises our aspiration to lead. But in leading, we are determined that we are knowledgeable, and information-led, making wise decisions in the work we do for Fife Council and the wider community of Fife.

2.2 What has gone well

2.2.1 RTPI Planning Awards

The Fife Pilgrim Way was recognised for its outstanding engagement and partnership working at the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Awards for Planning Excellence 2022.

The 64-mile waymarked trail received a Commendation in the category for Excellence in Planning for Heritage and Culture and was the only Scottish planning project entry to receive a prize, despite competing against multi-million-pound projects across the UK.

2.2.2 Loo of the Year Awards

Fife's public toilets are among the best in the UK, according to judges of the 2022 Loo of the Year Awards, the 'Washroom Oscars' held in Birmingham.

FCCT manages 15 public toilets on behalf of Fife Council and was delighted to lift the UK trophy for Public Toilets. FCCT also won the UK Market Sector Award for Beaches (Harbourmaster's House, Dysart) and were listed in the Local Authority Public Toilet Premier League. FCCT also lifted Scotland national awards for ECO-Friendly Toilets (Craigmead in the Lomond Hills), Local Authority Entries, Beaches (Harbourmaster's House), Car Parks toilets (Elie Harbour) and for Washroom Cleaner of the Year, which went to the FCCT in-house cleaning team.

2.2.3 Access and Recreation Team – Getting the Message Across

Visitor numbers across FCCT sites continued to be above pre-pandemic levels. The Access and Recreation Team works hard to ensure there is effective countryside

management at sites, by sharing the Scottish Outdoor Access Code's key elements with all user groups, be they visitors, residents, or landowners.

2.2.4 Countryside Warden Patrols

Countryside Wardens carry out regular patrols of Fife's coast and countryside engaging with a wide variety of user groups including farmers and landowners, residents, walkers, dog walkers, fell runners and mountain bikers. Their engagement activities are vital to ensure that all user groups understand their responsibilities as laid down in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

2.2.5 Fife Pilgrim Way

Since opening in July 2019, the Fife Pilgrim Way continues to grow in popularity attracting local walkers and those from further afield. The UK's first ever Pilgrim Pastor, Duncan Weaver, took up his post on St Andrews Day 2022. His role is to encourage modern pilgrims to make their own pilgrim journeys.

2.2.6 Beaches

West Sands in St Andrews celebrated its 30th Keep Scotland Beautiful Beach Award in 2022, having won it every year since the scheme launched in 1992. Fife remains the Local Authority with the most beach awards in Scotland.

2.2.7 Biodiversity Officer

The Fife Biodiversity Partnership has been reformed after a three-year hiatus. The Fife Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) is undergoing extensive review; the updated document will support biodiversity planning across Fife for the future.

2.2.8 Restoration Forth

Restoration Forth was launched in 2022. This 3-year project aims to improve Firth of Forth water quality and habitat by re-introducing native Oyster and Seagrass populations. The first year is focused on engagement. FCCT is one of 6 Community Engagement Hubs around the Firth of Forth.

2.2.9 Lyne Burn Project

The Lyne Burn Project's first phase was to restore the burn to a more natural condition – following man-made changes – by reinstating its meanders, which has been achieved thanks to SEPA's Water Environment Fund. Over the past two years the project has engaged with around 500 adults and children, who have planted 2000 trees and 2000 bulbs. This video gives an overview of the project [The Lyne Burn Project November 2022 - YouTube](#)

2.2.10 Education

Spending time outdoors in green spaces has significant benefits to both physical and mental well-being, with an abundance of scientific studies establishing the link. This is one reason that encouraging people to make a connection with their local natural spaces is at the heart of FCCT's Mission Statement - Connecting Environment and People. This year has seen the launch of several new educational initiatives including:

Branching Out

FCCT's 'Branching Out' programme allows people who are affected by poor mental health to experience the powerful healing that accessing greenspaces and woodlands can have on their wellbeing. The programme incorporates weekly photography assignments and is underpinned by the 5 Ways to Wellbeing.

2.2.11 Volunteering

FCCT Volunteers contribute to many different projects from tree planting, invasive species removal, woodland, and grass management to litter picking. As an organisation FCCT values volunteers' contribution and this year launched a volunteer newsletter which

focuses on their contribution and gives them a chance to see what other volunteers have been involved with.

Volunteer Hours 12/4/22 to 30/03/23	
<i>Education (Schools, College, Universities)</i>	70
<i>Community Groups</i>	511
<i>Individuals</i>	711
<i>Corporate (Businesses)</i>	801
Total	2093 *

*(full-time equivalent 1.11 posts)

2.2.12 Operations Team

FCCT's Operations Team focuses on delivering Fife Council's SLA (Service Level Agreement), but also undertakes additional project work when opportunities arise to improve the many areas we care for. When possible, the team also delivers some goodwill activities to support Fife's communities. Further detail is available in the attached Annual Report.

2.2.13 Fife Outdoor Tourism Infrastructure Programme Car Park Upgrades

During late 2022/early 2023 several Fife car parks have been upgraded as part of a project funded by Fife Outdoor Tourism Infrastructure Programme (FOTIP). After consultation with communities, landowners, and stakeholders, FCCT has introduced Parking Charge Notification (PCN) schemes to several car parks.

2.2.14 Toilet Upgrades

Craigmead toilets, which won the Scotland National Award for ECO-Friendly Toilets in the Loo of the Year Awards 2022, have benefited from the installation of solar panels.

A modern new toilet block, with 24/7 access, has been installed at Elie Ruby Bay. The block of six cubicles includes a chemical toilet disposal point that's open from 10 am to noon. One unisex toilet is open overnight, all year round, and an accessible toilet is available 24/7 by using a RADAR key.

A new toilet block (single unit) with a chemical disposal point at Kinghorn Pettycur Bay.

2.2.15 Restoring our Rivers

FCCT are working hard to deliver a river restoration project focused on a 2.5-mile section of the River Leven between Windygates and Leven, and a further section on one of its tributaries, the Back Burn, flowing from the Lomond Hills.

Fife Council and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) commissioned the projects, supported initially with funding from the Water Environment Fund (WEF) and Fife Council.

FCCT is delighted to be managing both projects from concept design through to delivery on behalf of Fife Council.

2.2.16 Blended Finance

Blended finance is a powerful tool that can help us to secure funding for our projects and activities, while also leveraging additional investment from private sector sources. By combining public and private resources, we can bridge the funding gap and achieve our objectives more efficiently and effectively. This is particularly important for us as a charity, as we rely on a limited pool of supporters to fund our work.

Blended finance can help us to achieve greater sustainability in our work. By combining public and private capital, we can encourage private investors to adopt more sustainable practices, such as renewable energy or sustainable agriculture. This can help to reduce our carbon footprint and promote sustainable land use, while also creating new business opportunities for local communities.

Blended finance is an important tool that we believe will help us to achieve our vision and Mission. We look forward to exploring the opportunities that blended finance can offer us, and to working with partners in the public and private sectors to achieve our goals.

2.2.17 Nature Finance Fife

This year has seen the Development team at FCCT establish Nature Finance Fife. This is a collaborative initiative that seeks to develop and deliver a pipeline of high integrity nature-based projects in Fife that when delivered, will create a healthier environment that supports wellbeing and sustains the balance between people and nature. We will do this through a blend of public, private, and philanthropic finance that drives the landscape scale changes needed to tackle both the climate and nature emergencies while simultaneously meeting the needs of communities and facilitating a just transition to a green economy.

As it stands at the end of the 2022/23 financial year, this collaboration has already brought together 3rd sector and not for profit organisations, regulators, local authority, specialist consultants, land managers, community, academia, private companies, funders, and investors keen to understand and realise the needs and aspirations of each stakeholder while focusing on aligning local business, community interests, and development opportunities.

2.2.18 Strategic Network Development

FCCT's innovative approach to diversifying revenue streams and delivering benefits for nature and people has driven us to reach out to national partners and networks. In October 2022, FCCT joined the Scottish Nature Finance Pioneers, a pioneering network of organisations and individuals coming together with the aim of developing new avenues for directing investment into nature projects and creating a high-integrity nature finance market in Scotland. With a particular focus on integrity and benefit for communities, FCCT joined the sub-group of the Nature Finance Certification Alliance, presenting to Scottish Government, the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital, and investment fund managers on the need for certification of high integrity nature-based projects to ensure a just transition through nature finance markets.

FCCT has continued to play a role in the Scottish Environment Fundraisers Forum; a sub-group of Scottish Environment LINK that shares learning and knowledge in the sector and engages with the Environmental Funders Network as well as individual funders to share information and communicate the needs of the environment sector.

Closer to home, FCCT has joined the Fife Local Advisory Group (LAG) of the Scottish Government Rural Community led Fund; an organisation that channels funding into rural community led projects and feeds back to government on the priorities and needs of rural communities in Fife.

2.3 Key challenges/risks

FCCT takes a dynamic approach to managing risks associated with our operations and activities. Risks are captured in a Risk Register and appropriate mitigation identified and implemented on a case-by case basis.

FCCT have spent time developing and implementing a strategy that sees the organisation building additional revenue streams around the core support provided by Fife Council. We have developed this strategy because since 2020/21 (and indeed for several years before this) FCCT have continually needed to draw on unrestricted reserves to cover the gap between operating costs and expenditure.

The organisation has been fortunate to have sufficient unrestricted funds for this to date, and these funds have an important role to play in ensuring cash-flow for large-scale projects such as establishing the Fife Pilgrim Way, river restoration projects, or replacement of key outdoor infrastructure. These funds also ensure FCCT has the resources for otherwise unfunded aspects of FCCT's business, as well as providing resilience in the face of unforeseen financial pressure.

Recent years have seen our unrestricted funds significantly depleted as pressure on FCCT's services has increased more rapidly than funding has been made available. To manage this, FCCT have at several junctures taken the decision to release funds designated to certain non-essential but important items.

Three examples of this are as follows:

1. In 2021/22 £150,000 that was designated to support the renovation of the Coastal Centre at FCCT Headquarters in Dysart was reduced to £25,000 with £125,000 allocated to reducing the operating deficit on the year. This has resulted in an extended closure for the Coastal Centre with plans for renovation put on hold.
2. £200,000 designated to support the replacement of vehicles in FCCT's fleet has been reduced with the emphasis placed instead on maintenance and repairs in favour of securing new (and possibly more efficient) vehicles. A lack of funding that can be directed at our fleet has also inhibited FCCT's ability to make a switch to electric vehicles as part of our vehicle fleet with up-front costs prohibitive.
3. In 2022/23 FCCT reduced our budget allocated to training and development by 50%. Once again, this was done to release designated funds.

A major challenge for FCCT is finding a way to halt the rapid reduction of our unrestricted fund so that the organisation can maintain a healthy level of reserves while continuing to deal with ever increasing demands on the services we provide.

2.4 Customers

FCCT directly and indirectly supports hundreds of thousands of people each year. Below are just some of the ways in which we make a positive difference to communities:

- Visitor numbers across our sites continued to be above pre-pandemic levels.
- Stretches of the 117-mile Fife Coastal Path are seeing increasing erosion, our team have been working with landowners and communities to find solutions to ensure the entire route can remain as intact as possible.
- As part of the Fife Pilgrim Way's promotion, FCCT delivers illustrated talks to community groups along the route.
- FCCT team and Board were among the group representing Dunfermline Heritage Partnership who welcomed King Charles to Dunfermline on his first official visit to Scotland since becoming king.
- Our monthly Eden Estuary newsletter is shared through our website and social media channels, with a growing readership now numbering around 3,000.
- Our Conservation & Engagement team hosted 44 events and delivered walks and talks to 659 participants across Fife. We also had a presence at 7 large events including the Fife Show, Scout Fest, Summer at Riverside Park, and some careers events.
- In the past two years the Lyne Burn Project has engaged with around 500 adults and children, who have planted 2000 trees and 2000 bulbs.
- Our 'Branching Out' programme allows people who are affected by poor mental health to experience the powerful healing that accessing greenspaces and woodlands can have on their wellbeing.
- Our support services team frequently support upwards of 60 individuals a day via phone call support and ask us enquiries related to the coast and countryside.

2.5 Service operations

FCCT's Conservation and Engagement team carried out 1,434 patrols and engaged with 3,727 individuals in person (an increase of 24% on last year). 485 old fires were cleared (an increase of more than 300% from the previous year), extinguished 25 live fires, engaged with 33 dog owners who did not have their dogs under appropriate control, and collected 429 bags of litter.

The figures below evidence the increased level of activity delivered by the FCCT over and above the requirements of our Service Level Agreement:

- FCCT are regularly active on 73 sites where the SLA stipulates activity on just 45 sites (an increase of 62%)
- 7,598 visits increased to 16,583 (an increase of 118%)
- 912 engagement patrols increased to 1,434 (Conservation and Engagement team only)
- 1,336 motor home users engaged increased 17% to 1,566.
- 429 additional bags of litter collected (Over and above regular emptying of 300+ bins and wider litter plan)
- 179 additional days of litter maintenance (over and above the already extended litter plan)
- 1000 additional days of open public toilets (above SLA requirements)

2.6 LGBF indicators and Plan4Fife impacts

The Fife Strategic Assessment 2020 discusses the Plan for Fife/Ambitions for Fife as one of the 4 performance frameworks and notes that not all of the indicators have consistent data, or targets set. Although FCCT doesn't currently contribute to directly reporting on

LGBF indicators, FCCTs work supports many of the Plan4Fife impacts. FCCT have a no wrong door approach at the core of our culture, responding above and beyond our SLA and placing the needs of individuals and communities first. We focus on place-based solutions driven by identifying need via community engagement, and our agility enables us to respond quickly.

Some of the Plan4Fife 'ambitions' that our work specifically supports include:

Opportunities for all

Fife has reduced levels of preventable ill health and premature mortality across all communities. – FCCT's main directive is connecting environment & people, improving accessibility of the outdoors by maintaining paths, providing facilities such as toilets, bins, toilets, carparks etc. The government's Environment Agency puts the value of everyone sharing these immense free "natural health service" benefits by having better and more equal access to green and open spaces at £2.1 billion. The Trust's work improves accessibility and educates communities by promoting the health benefits.

Thriving places

Fife's main town centres stand out as attractive places to live, work and visit. – FCCTs path maintenance litter picking and bin provision along with its awards for clean beaches and toilet facilities make Fife a more attractive place to live and work.

All our communities benefit from low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. – FCCT's involvement with regeneration projects prioritises community engagement to support in the sustainability of deliverables. When communities are involved in the design stages, the inherent ownership this instils supports a long-term provision of community care for the outputs.

Every community has access to high-quality outdoor, cultural and leisure opportunities. – Some of the ways in which FCCT has supported this ambition are as follows:

- Reinvigorating the FPW
- Installation of diversionary coastal path signage
- Construction and relocation of countryside furniture
- Removal of access points
- Tree Work and removal of invasive flora
- Re-Installation of general waste bins
- Fencing and bridge repair
- Drainage repairs
- Path repairs & upgrades
- Bins
- Carparks
- Toilets

Inclusive Growth and Jobs

Fife has year-on-year increases in visitor numbers and tourism spend. – The Trust's ongoing maintenance and improvements to the FCP including upgrading signage and responding to storm damage along with the provision of bins, toileting facilities, carpark management and beach cleaning have made Fife's coast an attractive tourism spot.

Community Led Services

Our public services are more joined up and acting 'one step sooner'. – FCCT led on the recent storm recovery work and is often the first port of call for issues noted by the general public, our agility and responsiveness to a range of issues such as bomb threats and dead whales demonstrates our ability to act one step sooner.

Fife's communities and individuals are more involved in local decision-making and in helping to plan and deliver local services. – FCCT's community engagement work includes:

- the development of a volunteer tree warden network hosted within the volunteer's communities.
- SMT attend community councils to ensure information sharing and accessibility to project design phases.
- community engagement work connected to specific project deliverables such as DBIR & RT2.
- the conservation and engagement team engaged with 659 individuals in 22/23 as part of their outreach work supporting our ability to design our services in response to need identified by the communities we serve.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1** In line with the Statutory Performance Indicator of the Local Government Act 1992, FCCT plays an important role in supporting the Local Authority to engage with, respond to, and help empower its communities, including those who require greater support through our care of Fife's outdoors as a valuable resource that is accessible to all regardless of social or economic status.
- 3.2** This report, in conjunction with the published annual report and audited accounts, provides information that demonstrates a commitment to best value through the transparent reporting of activity undertaken by FCCT on behalf of Fife Council.
- 3.3** FCCT remains committed to delivering the highest possible service with the resources available and taking an entrepreneurial approach to bridging the gap between available funding from the Local Authority and increasing demand on services. We will continue to advocate for greater investment in Fife's outdoors by the Local Authority and others and are fully convinced of the great benefits available to individuals and communities in doing so.

Report Contact: Jeremy Harris, FCCT CEO

Telephone: 01592 656 080

Email: Jeremy.Harris@fifecountryside.co.uk