

Title of Report:	Ballycarton to Binevenagh Trail Head Project
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure and Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	20 May 2025
For Decision or For Information	For Decision
To be discusses In Committee	NO

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and Enhancing our Environments and Assets Resilient, Healthy and Engaging Communities
Outcome	Citizens will have access to our natural environments to help develop their physical, emotional and cognitive health.
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism & Recreation

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	TBC

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	n/a
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

This report aims to obtain approval from Members for the Ballycarton to Binevenagh Trail Head Project. This partnership initiative, involving the Binevenagh Landscape Partnership, Forest Service, and NIEA, includes a Licence agreement with the Forest Service for a designated trail area. It encompasses a trail corridor for walking activities and a car park at Ballycarton. It features a trailhead, signage, and a Permissive Path Agreement for private lands connecting Ballycarton Wood to Binevenagh Mountain.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Ensuring the provision, development, and accessibility of quality walking opportunities across the Borough is a key goal for the Council's Tourism & Recreation Service. The Council oversees and maintains numerous miles of coastal, rural, and urban pathways, offering our residents and visitors access to natural outdoor resources while encouraging physical activity and connection with nature.

While most of the Council-managed walking experience occurs on Council-owned land, some areas are jointly maintained with organisations such as the National Trust and Forest Service, and in some cases, through licenses and management agreements with private landowners.

- 2.2 The Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership is a seven-year project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, totalling £3.4 million. Its vision is to celebrate and link local communities to their unique landscape and heritage, fostering sustainable and resilient communities. The Council plays a key role as a supporting partner in the Landscape Partnership.

- 2.3 As part of this partnership, a recreational audit conducted in the Binevenagh area revealed the potential to establish a 5.5-kilometre walking trail from Ballycarton to Binevenagh. This trail would provide appropriate access to the mountain and Binevenagh Nature Reserve, along with necessary information, signage, trail furniture, and parking facilities. OutScape prepared a Trail Prescription Document specifically for this route.

This process included:

- Collaborating with landowners to address concerns and ultimately obtain permission for access.
- Specifying the precise route of the trail.
- Identifying and estimating the necessary works and infrastructure to develop the trail.

- 2.4 A part of the route traverses privately owned land identified as sections 2, 3, and 4; please refer to the attached map in **Annex A**. To align with the Council's approach to ensure public access, Council agreed to enter into a Permissive Path Agreement with the landowner in June 2023. The path measures 962 metres in length and 2 metres in width. (Refer to the map in **Annex A**)

3.0 Proposal

- 3.1 A review and consultation as part of the Binevenagh Landscape Partnership project highlighted that Binevenagh & Ballycarton Forests could greatly enhance outdoor recreation in the Binevenagh area, especially for local residents.
- 3.2 One major initiative is to create trailhead facilities at Ballycarton, which includes re-grading the car park, landscaping, and providing visitor information. A 5.5km linear walking trail is planned to connect Ballycarton Forest to Leighery Road, as depicted in **Annex A**. This trail will formalise access to Binevenagh Nature Reserve and the surrounding uplands, where there is a clear demand for improved access. Moreover, it

promotes the use of Ballycarton Wood and its car park as an official starting point as an alternative access point at St Aidan's Church. Council officers and Forest Service staff have evaluated the projected costs for maintaining these facilities and a partnership approach to financing repairs and maintenance will be agreed between Council and Forest Service..

- 3.3 To progress this proposal will require Council to consider entering a licence agreement with the Forest Service for a designated trail corridor within the forest and the car park. NIEA will manage the trail's repair and maintenance within Binevenagh Nature Reserve. The Binevenagh Landscape Partnership will provide all project staff and oversee all project work with a budget of £234,000. Moreover, both the Forest Service and NIEA have agreed to discuss potential capital investment in the project.
- 3.4 The proposed route will have some surface dressing, stone pitching and appropriate trail furniture installed. These works are being funded through Binevenagh & Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership.

4.0 Issues and implications

- 4.1 Over the past four years, interest in outdoor recreation has markedly increased in the Binevenagh area. While this is a positive trend, it poses challenges for site management, particularly ensuring visitor safety and preventing adverse effects on the landscape. Initiatives identified under the Binevenagh Landscape Partnership Scheme provide a chance to create suitable facilities to improve the visitor experience and reduce negative impacts.
- 4.2 The key implication for the Council involves entering into a licence agreement with the Forest Service. Previous terms placed responsibility for broader management issues within the forest on the Council. However, the Forest Service has now agreed that under this license agreement, management and maintenance responsibilities will be shared and will focus solely on the car park area and the trail corridor, which is the Council's preference.
- 4.3 Should Council agree to progressing with a licence agreement with Forest Service then suitable budget will have to be identified for the joint maintenance and inspection to ensure that the quality of visitor experience is upheld.
- 4.4 There is no capital cost to Council with respect to the development of this proposal, only the required ongoing maintenance costs, which as noted, will be shared by Forest Service.

5.0 Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Leisure and Development Committee recommends to Council to enter into a licence agreement with Forest Service for the development of the trail head project at Ballycarton and Binevenagh Forest. As part of this licence agreement, Council will assume insurance liabilities for the trail head and trail corridor rails under the 25-year tenure of the licence agreement. Ongoing maintenance costs will be shared with Forest Service. The project will be subject to the condition that the Binevenagh & Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) provide and secure capital funding for the works required.

ANNEX A

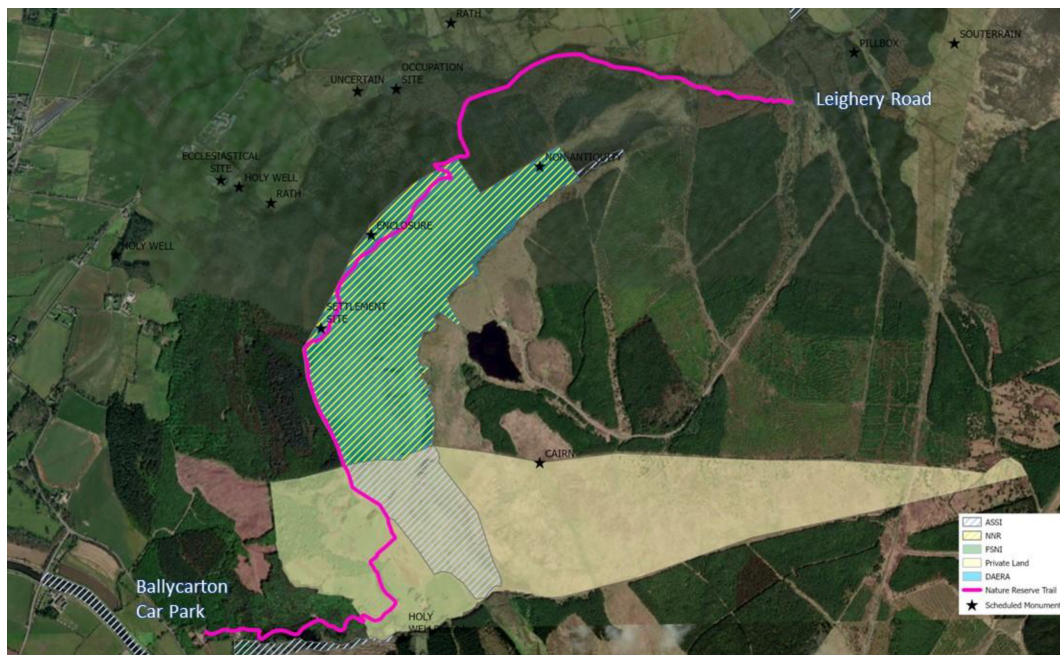


Fig. 4: Trail Works Map