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| Title of Report: | PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan Capital Projects – The Layde Path, Cottage Wood & Ronán’s Way Project |
| Committee Report Submitted To: | Leisure & Development Committee |
| Date of Meeting: | 18 March 2026 |
| For Decision or For Information | For Decision |
| To be discussed In Committee | NO |

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| Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25) | |
| Strategic Theme | Resilient, Healthy & Engaged Communities |
| Outcome | Council will work to develop and promote stable and cohesive communities across the Borough |
| Lead Officers | Head of Funding Unit Head of Service – Tourism & Recreation |

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| Budgetary Considerations | |
| Cost of Proposal | £ 1,185,113 (100% Funded) |
| Included in Current Year Estimates | YES/NO |
| Capital/Revenue | Capital |
| Code | |
| Staffing Costs | Staff Time |

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|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Legal Considerations | |
| Input of Legal Services Required | NO |
| Legal Opinion Obtained | NO |

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| Screening Requirements | Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals. | | |
| Section 75 Screening | Screening Completed: | Yes | Date: November 2023 |
| | EQIA Required and Completed: | Yes | Date: November 2023 |
| Rural Needs Assessment (RNA) | Screening Completed | Yes | Date: November 2023 |
| | RNA Required and Completed: | Yes | Date: November 2023 |
| Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) | Screening Completed: | No | Date: |
| | DPIA Required and Completed: | No | Date: |

1.0 Purpose of Report

To provide an update on the implementation of the PEACEPLUS Capital Project ‘The Layde Path, Cottage Wood & Ronán’s Way Project’ and request the Leisure and Development Committee to approve the project to move to Stage 2 of the Council’s approval process for the development of capital projects.

2.0 Background

2.1 The PEACEPLUS Partnership has been in operation since June 2022 and has overseen the design, development and implementation of the £6.1million PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan which was approved by Council on 5th December 2023. The PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan includes a capital budget for the development of 5 x capital projects including the ‘The Layde Path, Cottage Wood & Ronán’s Way Project.’ Full project information including programme aims, programme beneficiaries, budgets & participants, programme rationale and outputs, programme activities and key issues project will address are included as **Annex A**.

2.2 Through delegated authority, the PEACEPLUS Partnership has developed the project to Stage 1 of the Council’s approval process for the development of capital projects.

3.0 Stage 1

3.1 Council’s Capital Team undertook procurement in line with requirements of the PEACEPLUS programme for the appointment of an Integrated Consultancy Team. Following public procurement, the following appointments were made:

- Architect – Michael Herron Architects.
- Structural, Civil & Marine Engineer (LEAD) - Doran Consulting.
- QS - WH Stephens.

3.2 On 3rd February 2026, the Integrated Consultancy Team presented their Stage 1 report to Council’s PEACEPLUS Capital Projects Working Group. The report was presented as instructed, with itemised costings for each area so the project team could propose PEACEPLUS budget allocation to the section of the project compatible with the PEACEPLUS funding allocation.

3.3 Options for costings for each area were detailed in the Stage 1 report and are summarised below:

Layde Path

| Option 1 | Option 2 | Option 3 |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vegetation Clearing• Repairs to existing path• 5 x Timber bridge replacements• Trail surfacing & steps• Fencing• Retaining wall structure & associated temporary works Signage | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fire damage works• Replacing 2 x Timber bridges• Retaining wall structure & associated temporary works | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do nothing |
| £422,166 | £145,550 | £0 |

Cottage wood

| Option 1 | Option 2 | Option 3 |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invasive species removal • Steps / Handrail • Repairs to Existing Paths • Timber Bridges • Steps Replacement • Road Surfacing • Kerbing • New Fencing & repairs to existing fencing • Timber Handrail • Signage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invasive species removal • Steps / Handrail • Repairs to Existing Paths • Timber Bridges • Steps Refurbishment • Road Surfacing • Kerbing • New Fencing & repairs to existing fencing • Timber Handrail • Signage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do nothing |
| £565,840 | £405,522 | £0 |

Ronán's Way

| Option 1 | Option 2 | Option 3 |
|---|---|-------------------|
| Install WC in existing building with sewage treatment plant to allow discharge into river | Zero Discharge WC in standalone enclosure | PEACEPLUS funding |
| £225,100 | £48,071 | £0.00 |

Further details of the sites can be found at Annex **B and C**.

4.0 Current Position

4.1 The total costs for all 3 elements of this project far exceed the originally approved £275,000 PEACEPLUS grant funding. Council's Funding Unit has been working closely with the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) in a bid to secure additional funding to allow full completion of Layde Path and Cottage Wood Trails.

4.2 SEUPB have granted indicative approval for the increased grant funding to the PEACEPLUS Partnership to allow full completion of the Layde Path and Cottage Wood Trails. Funding allocated from PEACEPLUS for this project is £988,006 for construction costs and £197,107 for associated design team fees (Stage 2 onwards). Total funding allocation is £1,185,113.

4.3 Layde Path

£422,166 of funding to be allocated for capital works for the redevelopment of Layde Path. £84,222 of funding to be allocated for associated design team fees for the project (Stage 2 onwards). Total funding to be allocated is £506,388.

4.4 Cottage Wood

£565,840 of funding to be allocated for capital works the redevelopment of Cottage Wood. £112,885 of funding to be allocated for associated design team fees for the project (Stage 2 onwards). Total funding to be allocated is £678,725.

4.5 **Ronán's Way**

PEACEPLUS funding will not be used on this part of the project.

The land at Ronan's Way is not in Council ownership which could delay the project and put the overall project at risk of not completing within the PEACEPLUS timeframe.

On 13 February 2026 the PEACEPLUS Partnership agreed not to include Ronan's Way as part of the PEACEPLUS project at this time.

5.0 **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Leisure & Development Committee recommends to full Council:

1. Approval to proceed to Stage 2 for full design and build of the Layde Path and Cottage Wood project with £1,185,113 funding through the PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan.
2. That the PEACEPLUS Partnership continues to progress this project under delegated authority from Council, proceeding to complete all Capital Project Stages through to completion (Stage 3 & 4). Should the funding situation change or if the project costs exceed the costs noted in this report Officers will bring a report back into Committee requesting any necessary approvals.
3. Details of Tender Assessment and Report to be taken to Capital Projects Working Group (CPWG) for review and approval prior to proceeding to each Stage.
4. Officers will provide update reports to members after each stage, to update the members on progress and costs.

Annex A

| <u>Theme</u> | Local Community Regeneration and Transformation | <u>Programme Name</u> | (The Layd Path, Cottage Wood Ronán’s Way Development) | <u>Time Frame for delivery</u> | Autumn 2024 – Autumn 2026 |
|---|---|---------------------------|--|--|------------------------------------|
| <p><u>Programme Aim</u></p> <p>For many of the rural programming proposals in this Programme, there is an acknowledgement that during the lifetime of the PEACE Programming, quite a focus of programming or addressing need has often been in urban settings, looking at the obvious “flashpoints”, “peace lines”, “recognised territorial divisions”. In a sense many of the rural areas were, to an extent overlooked, the “peace hedges” not acknowledged enough, and whilst these outdoor settings in some instances, sit in areas regarded as “single-identity settings” they have the potential and the attraction to bring people together both from rural and urban settings to enjoy and appreciate in their respective settings. This is also an opportunity for local people from these areas to welcome people from across the Borough and wider afield, encouraging them to see the area for themselves at first hand, acknowledging what it has to offer and in tandem begin to debunk some of the myths or stereotypes around the locality, building confidence and a sense of pride in their wider locality, increasing actual cross-community & cross-cultural mobility, this presents a hugely positive opportunity.</p> <p>This proposal looks at a range of areas of interests, the immediate natural environment and heritage of the area, the built heritage in terms of the Layd Church, how its’ presence has witnessed much religious, cultural and political change, but the Church whilst not intact still stands the test of time. This is a spectacular conclusion to an equally spectacular walk along the North Antrim</p> | | | | | |

Coast. This walk, its' scenery and the inbuilt heritage provides us with an idea of the turbulent times that this locality would have experienced as far back as the time of the MacDonnell Clan, and that this heritage and history as an offering, educates us all about those times, how it influenced the landscape, and how much of that influence can be witnessed today. The Layd Church is a good example of a building whilst remaining the same in its physical nature, underwent waves of change in terms of its' worship, and that these changes and evolution are a good analogy for modern times.

Cottage Wood which is a haven for naturalists, environmentalists, red squirrel enthusiasts and those who appreciate the heritage of our native species will be offered the opportunity to engage in opportunities, with regards to conservation, awareness around invasive species and the opportunity to learn more about our red-squirrel population.

Ronán's Way offers potential beneficiaries the opportunity to take in the stunning scenery of this particular landscape of outstanding beauty, an opportunity to walk with a group, family or friends and to take in the views of Scotland on the horizon, to learn about the deep connections between there and the Glens of Antrim, to learn about the opportunities that farmers and landowners offer us through the provision of "rights of way", and to learn more about who "Ronan" was.

The aim of the Programme is 3 -fold:

- To upgrade and make safe the actual path and add improvements to the path furniture on the 2-mile loop, that runs from Cushendall to Cushendun along the North Antrim Coast, set against the backdrop of the Glens of Antrim, and the associated Programming and animation around this.
- The walk is a coastal cliff path walk beginning at Shore Street, Cushendall at the entrance to the

golf club and following the laneway northwards for approximately 200m before turning right onto the cliff path. Continue along the cliff path passing Salmon Rock and Port Vinegar taking you to the ruins of "Layd Church", a 13th century Franciscan foundation. Chief burial place of the MacDonnells after Bonamargy which has been built at least three times and served as a parish Church from 1306 to the end of the 18th century. Fine stones in the graveyard include a cross in memory of Doctor James MacDonnell, pioneer in the use of chloroform for surgical operations. This site is accessible all year around.

- Improvements to the "Cottage Wood" Path, to include addressing the environmental element of invasive species, appreciating the red squirrel population, upgrading the pathway and renewing the interpretative signage, so that the unique story of this place can be articulated through the planned animation and Programme of activities.
- Cottage Wood is found on the outskirts of Cushendall village. It is a 10-acre broadleaved woodland site, with a network of paths winding their way through viewpoints and picnic facilities. What makes this woodland a must to visit is a very special and increasingly rare inhabitant, the Red Squirrel, which is regularly seen in this woodland. The area contains a range of native and non-native species of trees and shrubs. Scots Pine, Elder, Holly, Ash, Horse Chestnut, Beech, Sycamore, Gorse, Spruce, Ivy, Laurel, Rhododendron, Elm and Fuchisa can all be found here. A wide range of plants grow below the woodland canopy including Wood Sorrel, Primroses, Saxifrage, Wild Garlic, Celandine,

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| <p>Bluebells, Violets, Herb Robert, Cuckoo.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The upgrade of Ronán’s Path, through the inclusion of a new septic tank and a toilet facility upgrade. Enabling a cohort of beneficiaries to enjoy the sights, views and understand the intertwined heritage between the Glens of Antrim and Scotland, learning about the associated folklore as the Programme develops, in addition the Programming will aim to encourage and support walkers and groups to consider and respect the layd, raising awareness of rights and responsibilities, leaving no trace. • Ronan’s Way will take you through a truly inspiring landscape, from the Glendun River through farmland, woodland scrub and peatland. It offers walks for a range of abilities, with the easier lower loop taking you up to Sevagh House and back down the river. The middle loop takes you through a steeper farm track to Con nag Cu and then across to the old ‘Meadow’ of Fear nag Capall and over to Timpan House. The more adventurous can go right up to the top of the Glen and take in the breath-taking views of the Irish countryside and beyond to the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland. | |
| <p><u>Programme Beneficiaries</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking Groups • Local population • Visitors • Health & Wellbeing Leaders • Naturists/environmentalists • Families • Dog-Walkers • We are also confident that we can offer participants from other thematic areas (Women, Social prescribing, Refugee Asylum Seeker, Older People’s Programme, the opportunity to make use of the site as part of their activity programming), adding to | <p><u>Budget & Participants</u></p> <p>£275,000</p> <p>435 Participants (70%CNR:25%PUL:5%Other)</p> |

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| sustainability throughout the inter-locking themes. | |
| <p><u>Programme Rationale & Outputs</u></p> <p>The Programme rationale is to open up, to a small extent, and make accessible in a safe way, the stunning and spectacular landscape of the Glens of Antrim through 3 areas, the Layd Path, Cottage Wood and Ronán’s Way in the hope that the attraction of these areas of hugely significant cultural and natural heritage will provide people with a better understanding of their local heritage and history in a way that will promote positive wellbeing, through an activity such as walking, or participating in an environmental project which will promote social connection, increase local knowledge.</p> <p>By the end of the Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 435 participants will have engaged in a Programme of outdoor activity across 3 sites. • The three named sites will have been opened to the wider local community in a safe and accessible way, leading to sustainability of use post-PEACEPLUS. • Increased numbers of people on a cross-community/cultural basis will be aware of the completed facilities as an option or an outlet for their activities. • A new cohort of educated individuals will be active to support the conservation and protection of their immediate natural environment. | |
| <p><u>Programme Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial launch event/scene-setting workshop in conjunction with the other Capital Build Projects, looking at the depth and breadth of the Programmes on offer, to look at the aims and objectives of each, to examine any linkages, or opportunities, to share ideas/resources, to consider potential challenges. To consider the inclusion of sign-posting the projects from each of the individual sites. A “PEACEPLUS Works” Forum will be established to last the lifetime of the Programme, so that beneficiaries have the opportunity to compare, contrast and connect (25 participants from each Capital Works). • The Layd Path – Activity Programme(18months–150 Participants) & Ronán’s Path – Activity Programming (18 months – 150 participants) A walking heritage Programme which will appeal to walkers both local and further afield, an opportunity for beneficiaries to get better acquainted | <p><u>Key Issues Project Will Address</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas or facilities of outdoor recreation can be used as tools for peace and reconciliation through organised and structured activity and animation. • The encouragement of the groups/organisations/users of this facility will understand sustainability in their approach and their ability to attract new users post-programme to enjoy and respect the environment, irrespective of their background, people will naturally come together due to their common interest or passion (e.g., walking, environmentalism, heritage). • The mindset that only certain people from a particular side of the community will make use of an outdoor recreation site, that in actual fact the “shared space” approach to our outdoor sites in a post-covid society has witnessed a positive upturn, and peoples’ habits have changed as a result, in this case an important factor is the fact that these sites bear testimony to our “shared history” and that they |

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| <p>with the routes and the path, and to participate in awareness raising workshops/sessions about the locality, the initial construction/need for the path, the co-operation and generosity of many landowners and to consider the heritage points along the path before arriving at the Laid Church and other viewpoints from a height. The cohort will be instrumental in the consultation for the installation of directional and interpretative signage along both routes/paths.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops on story telling and the inextricable link between Scotland, the Glens of Antrim, the geology, the folklore and myths that accompany it. • Walking/Tour Guide training will also be provided as an opportunity from a legacy point of view. • First Aid Training (delivered as a wider scope for the wider Programme) • Cottage Wood – Activity Programming (18 months – 135 participants) • The delivery of workshops/environmental sessions on the native species within the local woodland and the adjoining woodland, contrasting and comparing the change in our native woodland over the years. • Workshop/awareness sessions regarding invasive species. • Training workshop addressing how to best tackle invasive species, what steps to take, how to report and manage. • Opportunity to engage in taster sessions with “Red Squirrels” group in the Cushendall area, understanding the preservation of the species. • <u>Delivery of the Capital Works</u> (as outlined above). • <u>Finale Event</u> – An opportunity for the 3 sites to receive an “official launch”, with taster sessions, testimonies from | <p>are offered for everyone to avail of or learn about.</p> |
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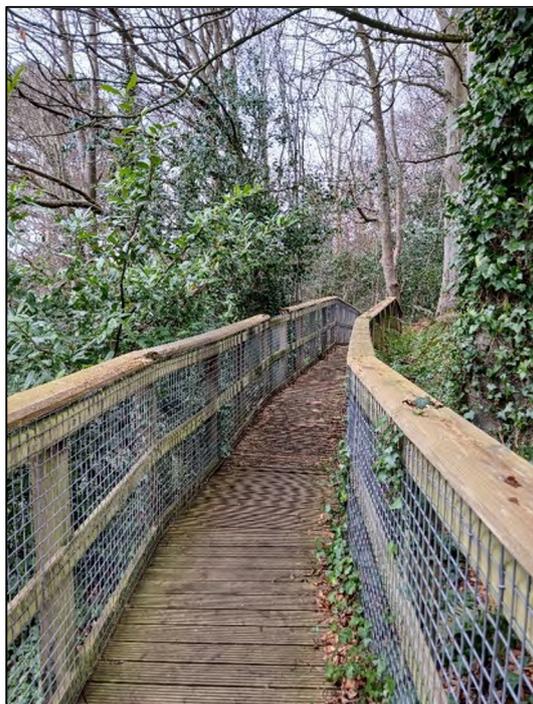
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| participants, beneficiaries and the community, to include links to QR Codes, internet sites and/or pamphlets if agreed. | |
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Annex B: Current condition

Layde Path

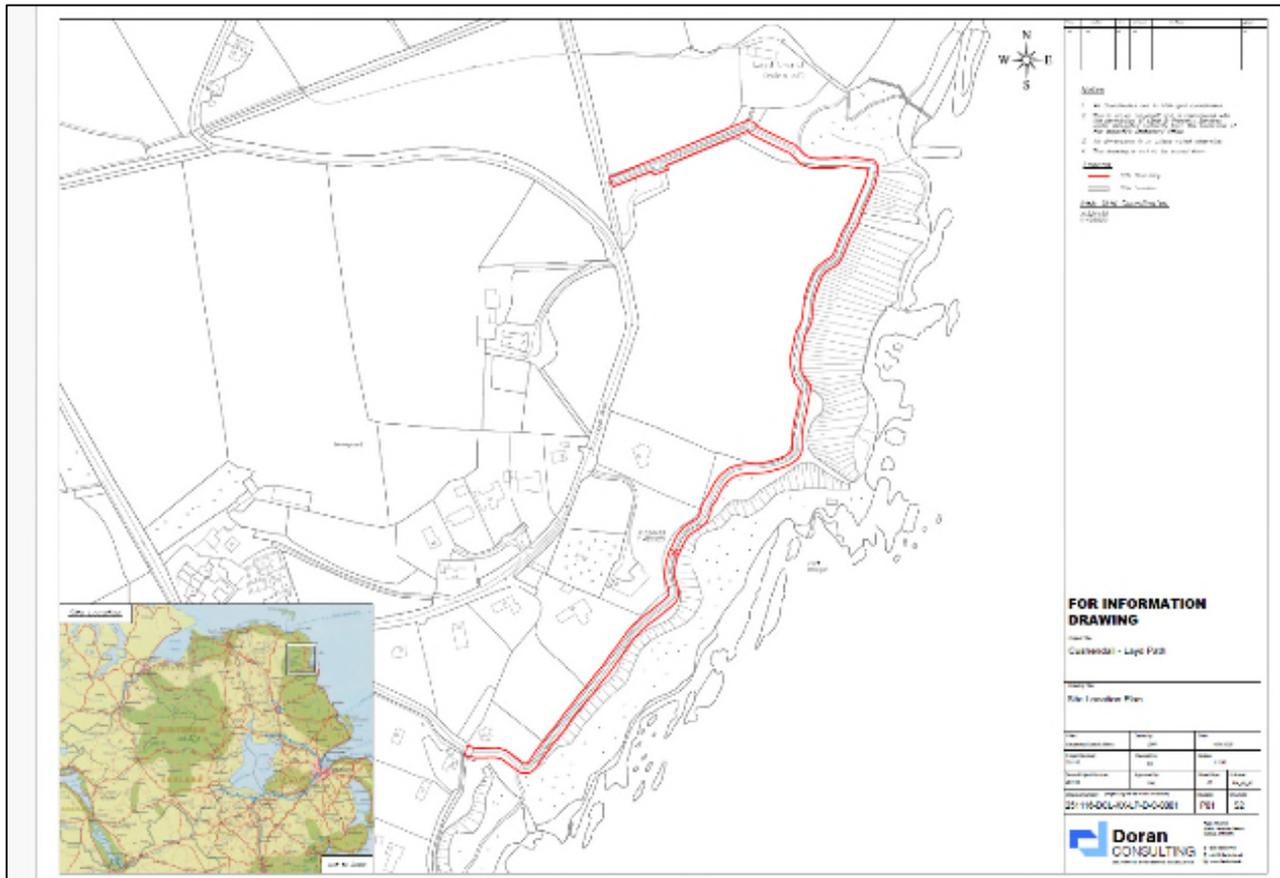


Cottage Wood



Annex C: Site Maps

Layde Path Map



Cottage Wood

