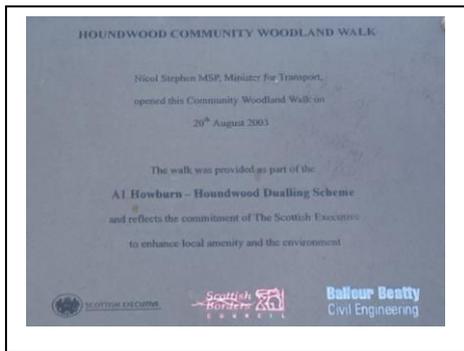


The Houndwood Walkway – A Community Asset to be Enhanced!

Introduction – The Houndwood Walkway



The Houndwood Walkway is a natural community asset that is sandwiched between the A1 and the main Berwick to Edinburgh railway line.

It was opened on 20th August 2001 and was gifted to the community because of the Dualling Scheme of the A1 and the development of a new junction at Houndwood.



It's accessible via a subway with easy car parking at the Houndwood Crematorium.



The Houndwood Walkway provides an open approach to the railway line with the additional natural benefit of the relocation of the Eye Water which enabled the trunk road between England and Scotland to expand.

Map of the Houndwood Walkway



The Houndwood Walkway – A Community Asset to be Enhanced!

The aim of this report is to highlight the community benefit that Houndwood Walkway offers now and what it can offer through partnership working for the future. It is anticipated that through a planned approach in terms of funding, resources, manpower and expertise (including biodiversity and environmental impact), this area can be further enhanced.

This report also gives a snapshot of what has been achieved so far through the dedication of a small band of resident volunteers and the potential going forward in the next five years.

The Current Position

As part of the Transport Scotland arrangement to bestow the Houndwood Walkway to the community, Borders Forest Trust was commissioned to assist the area in maintaining the location for a period of 25 years (2028).

This agreement between the two parties commenced in 2003 and since that time there has been limited engagement, maintenance, and future proofing of the area with Borders Forest Trust. Pre-Covid Nichola Hunt (Borders Forest Trust) attended a walk around with the Community Councillor, Elizabeth Robinson to discuss plans which included the removal of the tree guards which unfortunately are rotting the new saplings at their base. It is anticipated that this partnership will recommence more proactively with Borders Forest Trust, in particular Anna Craigen, who has highlighted that their services can include and are not limited to the following:

For FREE:

- Woodland management planning advice.
- Practical woodland management/ maintenance input from a small team of volunteers and groups from Borders College.
- Ecological surveying/ monitoring/ further habitat creation - this could include community wildlife themed events, e.g., BioBlitz, bat walks, butterfly, and moth walks.

In addition:

- The loan of good quality Trail Cameras with accompanying training and support on how to use them.
- Assistance with organising other types of community events - arts, heritage, and culinary.
- Access to grants - South of Scotland Tree Planting Grants (fund managed by BFT), plus in house experience in offering support, advice, and assistance in applying for other wide ranging grant funds.
- Links with local schools and groups - developing appropriate projects and leading outdoor education sessions at the site.
- Developing interpretation projects: trails, boards, leaflets, and sculptures.

Borders Forest Trust have a wide network of friends, volunteers, supporters, contractors, and specialist skilled experts to cover just about every eventuality.

The Houndwood Walkway – A Community Asset to be Enhanced!

Local Involvement

Since 2012, Houndwood residents have dedicated and volunteered their time to make the walkway as accessible as possible with the purchase of a tractor from the Drone hill Windfarm Benefit Funds. Prior to this the vegetation was 3-4 ft high. With the recent purchase of a tractor, the paths are maintained. Although it is worth noting that the tractor has its limitations and can get 'bogged down' or topple if traversing across the paths. The purchase of a tractor front bucket will help to flatten areas, coupled with strimmer and bush cutter would be idea as progress would be made on the rough terrain and ensuring health & safety is sustained.

Community Matters in Conversation!
I have some very large maps printed of Grantshouse, Harelawside, Houndwood and I'd like to cordially invite you all for an afternoon at Grantshouse Village Hall for the first of 'Community Matters in Conversation'.
This is an opportunity to find out what excites you about living here, what annoys you about living here and if there was a magic wand, what would you like to happen.
Come along for Tea, Coffee, Juice & Cake.

Children and Teens are very welcome as their voices, drawings and thoughts are vital.



Community Matters in Conversation on:
Saturday 10th September 2-4pm.

In September 2022, a community event took place inviting the residents to take part in an engagement exercise with maps and flags (Similar to Planning for Real). It was anticipated that the neighbours would identify things that could enhance the area. The following table presents the findings pertaining to the Houndwood Walkway.

The Findings

Cycle path from Houndwood to Grantshouse
Improve Houndwood Walkway
Cut shrubs back
Dog poo and litter bins at the start of the Houndwood Walkway
Cycle path from Grantshouse to Reston Station
Cycle path from Grantshouse to Co'path

Plans for the Walkway - Short Term



The resident volunteers have removed several unnecessary tree guards which can be found in the undergrowth. There are many more to remove from around the trees.

The trees were originally planted very closely together by Transport Scotland which has sadly had an impact on their growth. These spindly saplings can be easily pushed down and are being done so to make way for accessible pathway loops for both walkers and tractor.



The Houndwood Walkway – A Community Asset to be Enhanced!

The existing paths have been improved and current users include residents with motorised disability scooters, buggies, and dog walkers. Numbers of visitors from other villages (Reston and Cockburnspath) have increased as the area is being noted for its wildlife diversity and this has encouraged birdwatchers, and observations of badgers, deer, kingfishers, herons, otters and even Mandarin ducks!



Signage in terms of finger posts have been provided by the Countryside Ranger in 2014. More can be done to demarcate certain areas (orchard, picnic spots, pathway loops, bridges, wildlife tunnel). This could be provided pictorially with a wooden map at the start of the walkway (Houndwood subway).

There are no bin facilities and with being adjacent to the A1 this can present problems either from the wind turbulence from vehicles or the drivers or passengers themselves. It would be useful to explore the reach that SBC (Scottish Borders Council) could provide in terms of rubbish and dog poo bins. Perhaps they could be located adjacent to the bus stop, and the underpass on the Houndwood side.



The seating by the pond is ideal for the area as it's made of a composite material and is maintenance free. The same seat could be purchased to replace the rotten seat that looks over the meadow to the railway line.



It's been identified that there is a piece of adjacent land that runs alongside the railway and the Houndwood Walkway that potentially could be incorporated and make a further extension of pathway loop. It'll be useful to find out who owns this land and if it's possible to undergo an option appraisal to include this in the long-term plan for the area.

The inclusion of expertise is important to celebrate what the area has to offer in terms of biodiversity and natural environment. Our aim is to work in partnership to obtain aerial photographs and visuals, reports, and analysis as this will foster and encourage residents to celebrate what Houndwood Walkway already offers (therefore promote more volunteers) and motivate additional partners, funding for future aspirations for the area. This may also include the installation of bat and owl boxes as the natural habitat is perfect for nocturnal wildlife.

The Houndwood Walkway – A Community Asset to be Enhanced!



There is also a 'beach bank' next to the Eye Water which adds huge potential for residents and visitors to enjoy the area during the summer months. Additional picnic tables and seating area would add value alongside a grassy bank and wildflower bomb planting which would be very exciting for the younger residents.



Adjacent access via the subway and the slopes will require more subdued lighting as nesting swallows enjoy the location. Liaise with SBC and explore LED lighting or for lights to come on at the same time as streetlights.

The above activities can be easily facilitated within the local area with additional expertise.

Medium Term Plan

The land can become boggy and flooded as the Eye Water is one of the fastest flowing rivers in Scotland. In addition, with having high banks on the rail track side, there can be vast volumes of run off and surface water. This is added to because in one location along the walkway is a natural spring. Therefore, the construction of land drains or culverts would be useful to keep the area as dry as possible. In addition, more robust and harder paths would help with accessibility and health & safety.



There is also a retired and rotten boardwalk. This is best removed as it'll widen the path further making walking two abreast easier with dogs or buggies.

At the time of visiting (November 2022), the pond was very full of bullrushes which were now placed at the centre of the pond. There is a different vista in the summer months, with the bullrushes taking a dominant position which may influence the natural habitat for other wildlife. Ideally thinning of the bullrushes would also give space to a creative Duck Island.



This Medium-Term Plan could be easily executed with the additional workforce and skills of the 'Community Payback Team' in liaison with Neil Pringle of SBC.

The Houndwood Walkway – A Community Asset to be Enhanced!

Long Term Plan



There are several mature apple trees at the corner of the meadow before dropping down to the Eye Water. Access to this small orchard is via a recently cut path which follows the boundary fence. This could facilitate cycling as well as pedestrian access. As such, there may be opportunity to liaise with Sustrans and see if there is mutual benefit of investing and

opening a cycle path that connects Houndwood Walkway with Auchencrow and Reston.

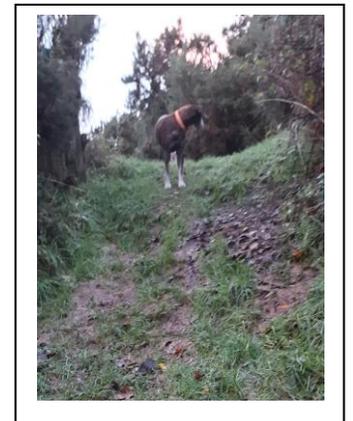


At the railway bridge, the Eye Water flows underneath. There is a newly erected wooden boundary fence. Unfortunately, it appears that this has been swept away by the large rainfall this month (November 2022). However, there is a potential to purchase and instal a second-hand bridge at this point. It would cross over to the other bank and join an existing path which runs in

parallel with the railway line. This could potentially increase the looped cycle and pedestrian route as previously mentioned and thereby avoid the potential hazards of the A1. It's also worth noting that an old farm track, although overgrown runs alongside the Eye Water on the opposite bank. Apparently, this trail used to be part of the Houndwood Walkway and maybe it could be resurrected in the future.



Access for wildlife through the wildlife tunnel which runs under the A1 is vital as badger prints have been seen in the past. At this same junction is a very steep gradient and ideally it would be worth reducing the impact by adding hardcore, maybe extending the wildlife tunnel, and making this path accessible to people and animals alike.



In conclusion

The Houndwood Walkway is a fantastic local asset that will bring all generations together with nature. It requires a 5-year plan with a combination of local engagement, partners and perhaps the establishment of a Houndwood Walkway Environmental Volunteer Group (with a reach beyond the immediate Grantshouse boundaries). This will enable momentum to continue for current and future generations whilst exploring further opportunities for wildlife habitats.

During Covid, the residents and some Community Councillors invested much time and effort in making improvements to the walkway. They are to be commended for their endeavours. Now is the moment for

The Houndwood Walkway – A Community Asset to be Enhanced!

further investment in terms of equipment, time, and resources. The Houndwood Walkway Plan is a rough guide to facilitate such investment and development.

The Windfarm Benefit Monies and other funding resources can easily be accessed and aligned to the 5-year plan with the added advantage of the Community Payback Team for manpower and skills (via SBC).

Natural spaces are to be enhanced as it's been widely researched that green spaces assist with mental wellness. The Houndwood Walkway is a great place for families, schoolchildren, residents, and visitors. It can sustain new ways of thinking and behaviours as climate change is everybody's business.

The Houndwood Walkway project marries up very well with Place Planning. This Scottish Government Initiative will assist in the local community celebrating what's in their own 'backyard'. Furthermore, the Houndwood Walkway could be recognised and embraced beyond this local setting and be part of SBC's Local Development Plan. Putting it in context, the Houndwood Walkway is Place Planning in action! It's using the donation of a community asset to augment the environment for residents, visitors, and wildlife alike.

Report written by Jennie Sutton, Community Development Officer, November 2022

The Houndwood Walkway – A Community Asset to be Enhanced!

Houndwood Walkway Plan

Short term	Action	Outcome
	Contact Borders Forest Trust and ask for the Scope of Work, what's been actioned to date and confirmation of budget that is available for the next 5 years.	Managing expectations of what falls under the Borders Forest Trust remit and work together on aspects for a 1 – 5-year plan.
	Purchasing additional equipment to manage paths using funds from Quixwood rather than Drone hill because of forthcoming growing season.	Maintain existing paths and further develop others on the current footprint of the walkway.
	Contact SBC regarding site of bins.	Provide facilities for the public and keep the area as litter free as possible.
	Contact Countryside Ranger for additional finger signage.	Provide wooden map of pathways and points of interest.
	Purchase replacement seat.	Offer resting spot and enhance wellbeing.
	Purchase composite picnic table at the site of the pond.	Provide resting place and facilities for public.
	Fruit trees planted at start of walk on far side require stakes	Provide harvest for people and animals alike.
	Contact Land Registry to ascertain who owns the meadow.	Liaise and look at an option appraisal to incorporate additional land as part of the Houndwood Walkway.
	Contact relevant expertise to highlight the natural benefits of the area.	Robust analysis and reporting to promote the area and ongoing investment (time, funds, and wellbeing).
	Installation of bat and owl boxes.	Enhance the nocturnal wildlife.
	Implement LED lighting in the subway to foster natural environment for nesting birds.	More subdued and sustainable lighting.
	Beach Bank area to place picnic tables and wildflower bomb planting which is accessible too.	Local amenities to bring residents together and enjoy what's on their doorstep.
Medium Term	Excavation for land drainage via the Community Payback Team.	Drier under foot and address public liability of the area in terms of maintaining pathways for all.
	Removal of the boardwalk.	Widening pathway and recycling the wood for other natural courses.
	Removal of the tree guards and either repurpose or dispose of.	Trees able to survive and thrive.
Long Term	Excavate the previous Houndwood Walkway on the opposite bank of the eye.	Expanding the loop and joining in with existing cycle paths.
	Investigate the potential for a second-hand bridge to make easy and safe access to the other side of the bank.	As above and liaise with Sustrans and Paths for All.

The Houndwood Walkway – A Community Asset to be Enhanced!

	Hardcore to be added at the site of the wildlife tunnel to reduce gradient whilst also making it accessible for wildlife and people.	People, plants, and wildlife are safe and in harmony.
--	--	---