ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee
DATE	18 November 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Core Paths Programme: Investment Priorities 2026/27 - 2028/29
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/25/247
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	David Dunne
REPORT AUTHOR	Gordon McLean
TERMS OF REFERENCE	7, 8

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Core Paths Programme: Investment Priorities 2026/27 - 2028/29 for approval.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

2.1 Notes the methodology and analysis in this report regarding the Core Path Programme: Investment Priorities 2026/27 – 2028/29;

2.2 Approves the Core Paths Programme: Investment Priorities 2026/27 - 2028/29;

2.3 Instructs the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to report back to this Committee in June 2026 with a fully scoped and costed set of Core Path improvement projects informed by the Core Paths Programme: Investment Priorities.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

Background Information

3.1 The Aberdeen City Core Path network consists of 100 Core Paths covering approximately 241 kilometres (km) of active travel and leisure routes. The Aberdeen Core Path Plan Vision is that: *Aberdeen's core paths network will form a complete paths network throughout the City, encouraging healthy and sustainable access opportunities for all.*

3.2 In July 2022 Stantec was funded and commissioned by NESTRANS to conduct a thorough Core Path Network Survey to assess paths, identify any health and safety concerns and grade their condition to provide detailed baseline information. This survey provided data to carry out a number of Core Path improvements over the previous three years. This prioritisation was driven by a

number of factors within the Stantec methodology with health and safety issues being a major component. The following is a list of Core Paths where improvement works were undertaken: Core Paths 18 (Murcar Beach), 21 (River Don to City Centre), 34 (Brimmond Hill), 56 (Hazlehead Golf Course), 57 (Hazlehead to Gairnhill Wood), 60 (Anderson Drive to Den Wood via Craigiebuckler), 61 (Hazledene Road to Countesswells Road), 63 (Den of Cults (North)) and 78 (Coastal Path South)

3.3   At the Net Zero, Environment and Transport (NZET) Committee meetings of 19th March and 10th June 2025 the Committee approved the release of Bus Lane Enforcement (BLE) surplus income to 'Core Paths / Outdoor Access Projects Fund' ([BLE-LEZ Programme Report.pdf](#) / [BLE Programme 2425 Report DD.pdf](#)). This required a 3-Year Programme to be developed, this report provides that.

3.4   The aforementioned approvals allocate any surplus BLE funds to the following themes:
1. General active travel/ public transport maintenance – 10% (£50k minimum)
2. Core Paths / Outdoor Access – Maintenance – 10% (£50k minimum)
3. Core Paths / Outdoor Access – Storm Damage – 5%
4. Core Paths / Outdoor Access – Projects Fund – 50%
5. Other Projects – 25%

Line 4 is the percentage of any BLE surplus that this report relates to.
The level of BLE surplus will change every year, however, minimum funding levels are noted under two of the themes.

3.5   The Stantec Core Path Network Survey provided baseline path information. Since receiving the findings of the survey, officers have undertaken further information gathering and analysis to develop updated Investment Priorities. 21 Core Paths have now been prioritised for investment over the next 3-year period on this basis.

The following information sources contributed to further analysis and development of the Investment Priorities:
*   [Community Planning Aberdeen Locality Plans](#)
*   [Aberdeen Open Space Audit: 2024](#)
*   On the ground path knowledge from Council Officers (Aberdeen City Council (ACC) Natural Environment Policy Team, Environmental Services, Countryside Rangers)
*   Funding available from Developer Obligations (DO)

3.6   Information gathering sessions were held with colleagues from Community Planning Aberdeen, ACC Environmental Services / Countryside Ranger Service, Transport Strategy and Programmes team, Aberdeen Health Determinants Research Collaboration and Walking Scotland (formerly Paths for All). These discussions provided background information and helped to shape the prioritisation methodology that has subsequently been developed.

3.7 Prioritisation and scoring of Core Paths for investment was conducted using a series of data and indicators, see table 3.12 for more detail.

3.8 Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA) have identified Priority Neighbourhoods as areas where people experience significantly poorer outcomes than other people across the city and Scotland as a result of socio-economic disadvantage. Core Paths in Priority Neighbourhoods were therefore given higher weighting due to the role of path infrastructure in promoting public health and wellbeing and therefore the potential to contribute to the reduction of inequalities in these neighbourhoods. Investing in safe, accessible, and attractive path infrastructure can have far-reaching positive effects on both individual and community wellbeing.

3.9 The Aberdeen Open Space Audit: 2024 highlights the importance of accessible open spaces and providing suitable path infrastructure to connect these spaces. The Audit identifies areas for improvement and highlights wards with below average scores for health & physical activity, accessibility, and core path quality indicators. Wards with below average scores in these areas have been prioritised for path and accessibility improvements.

3.10 Paths requiring improvements and those with current projects identified by officers have been prioritised according to their feasibility for delivery and the availability of additional funding sources, such as Developer Obligations, to maximise the potential scope and benefits these projects can deliver.

Core Path Prioritisation

3.11 Core Paths that are either entirely or primarily on pavements / footways have been excluded from the Investment Priorities. This decision was taken as these routes are generally already managed and maintained as part of the road network. This excludes 14 Core Paths from our total of 100.

3.12 Following the exclusion of paths as described above, the below table outlines the methodology for scoring the remaining 86 Core Paths for investment:

Path Scoring Category	Description	Maximum Available Score
Core Path Network Survey Baseline Priority:	Path was ranked as a priority path in the Stantec Core Path Network Survey	1
Priority Neighbourhood Status:	Path is in a Community Planning Aberdeen Priority Neighbourhood	5
Aberdeen Open Space Audit Scores:	Paths in wards that have below citywide average Aberdeen Open Space Audit scores for one or more indicators: • Fit For Purpose Core Paths score • Accessibility score	3

	• Healthy & Physical Activity score	
Developer Obligations:	Path has Developer Obligation match funding available	2
Recent Path Investment (note - this category reduced a paths overall score):	Path has had investment / improvements in previous 3 years (as directed by the previous Stantec Core Path Network Survey)	-1
Project Priority Status:	Paths and their respective low, medium or high path project priority status based on Officer input	5
Connectivity:	Path connectivity scores based on each path's length and connectivity	1.5

Core Paths Programme: Investment Priorities 2026/27 to 2028/29

3.13 Based on the methodology, the following table outlines the top 21 Core Path Investment Priorities for financial years 2026/27 to 2028/29:

* The Aberdeen Core Path Plan is scheduled for review over the next 18 months. Should that review result in the removal of any of the below Core Paths from the Aberdeen Core Path Plan then it will be removed from the Investment Priorities also.

Core Path No.	Core Path Name	Ward	Priority Neighbourhood	Score
79	Kincorth Hill	Kincorth / Nigg / Cove	Kincorth, Leggart & Nigg	15.5
6	River Don Path - Dyce to Bridge of Don	Tillydrone / Seaton / Old Aberdeen & Dyce / Bucksburn / Danestone	Tillydrone	13
22	Rosehill Drive to Don Terrace via Stewart Park	Hilton / Woodside / Stockethill	Woodside, Tillydrone	12
20	University to Beach via Linksfield and Broad Hill	George St / Harbour	Seaton	12
21	River Don to City Centre	Tillydrone / Seaton / Old Aberdeen & George St / Harbour	George Street	11.5
15	Manor Avenue to Eric Hendrie Park	Northfield / Mastrick North	Northfield, Mastrick, Middlefield, Cummings Park	10.5

|				
78	Coastal Path South	Torry / Ferryhill & Kincorth / Nigg / Cove	Torry	10.5
82	Kincorth to Loirston Loch	Kincorth / Nigg / Cove	Kincorth, Leggart & Nigg	10
14	Lochside/Denmore Woods to Perwinnes Moss	Bridge of Don		10
42	Kingswells to Howes Road	Kingswells / Sheddocksley / Summerhill	Northfield	9.5
45	Deveron Road to Gillahill Croft	Kingswells / Sheddocksley / Summerhill	Mastrick	9.5
105	Kincorth Hill to Stonehaven Road	Kincorth / Nigg / Cove	Kincorth, Leggart & Nigg	9.5
46	Sheddocksley to Kingswells	Kingswells / Sheddocksley / Summerhill	Northfield	8.5
8	Auchmill Golf Course	Dyce / Bucksburn / Danestone	Heathryfold	8.5
23	Westburn Park	Midstocket / Rosemount	Ashgrove	8
85	King George 6 Bridge	Kincorth / Nigg / Cove	Kincorth, Leggart & Nigg	8
47	Manor Avenue to Auchmill Road	Northfield / Mastrick North	Heathryfold, Middlefield	8
66	Deeside Way	Airyhall / Broomhill / Garthdee & Torry / Ferryhill & Lower Deeside		7.5
81	Cove Road	Kincorth / Nigg / Cove	Kincorth, Leggart & Nigg	7.5
75	Bon Accord Crescent Gardens	Torry / Ferryhill	Kincorth, Leggart & Nigg	7.5
61	Hazledene Road to Countesswells Road	Hazlehead / Queens Cross / Countesswells		7.5

3.14 Investment in Core Paths can include multiple interventions in order to improve accessibility and encourage more people to become active for their physical and mental wellbeing. Path projects can include path surface and width upgrades, signage / interpretation, seating, removing barriers to access, and green infrastructure / planting. All of these elements combine to make the path network easier and more appealing to use.

3.15 Specific details for the Core Paths projects will be fully scoped and costed and reported back to this Committee in 2026. While the order in Table 3.13 serves as a guide, it remains flexible depending on factors like cost (which include both design and build elements), landownership, match funding, and planning considerations. Some or all of the 21 prioritised Core Paths may be completed within the three years. If completed early, a new set of priorities will be developed and proposed.

Geographical Distribution

3.16 The below map shows the geographical distribution of the priority Core Paths overlayed with the Community Planning Aberdeen Priority Neighbourhoods and Electoral Wards:
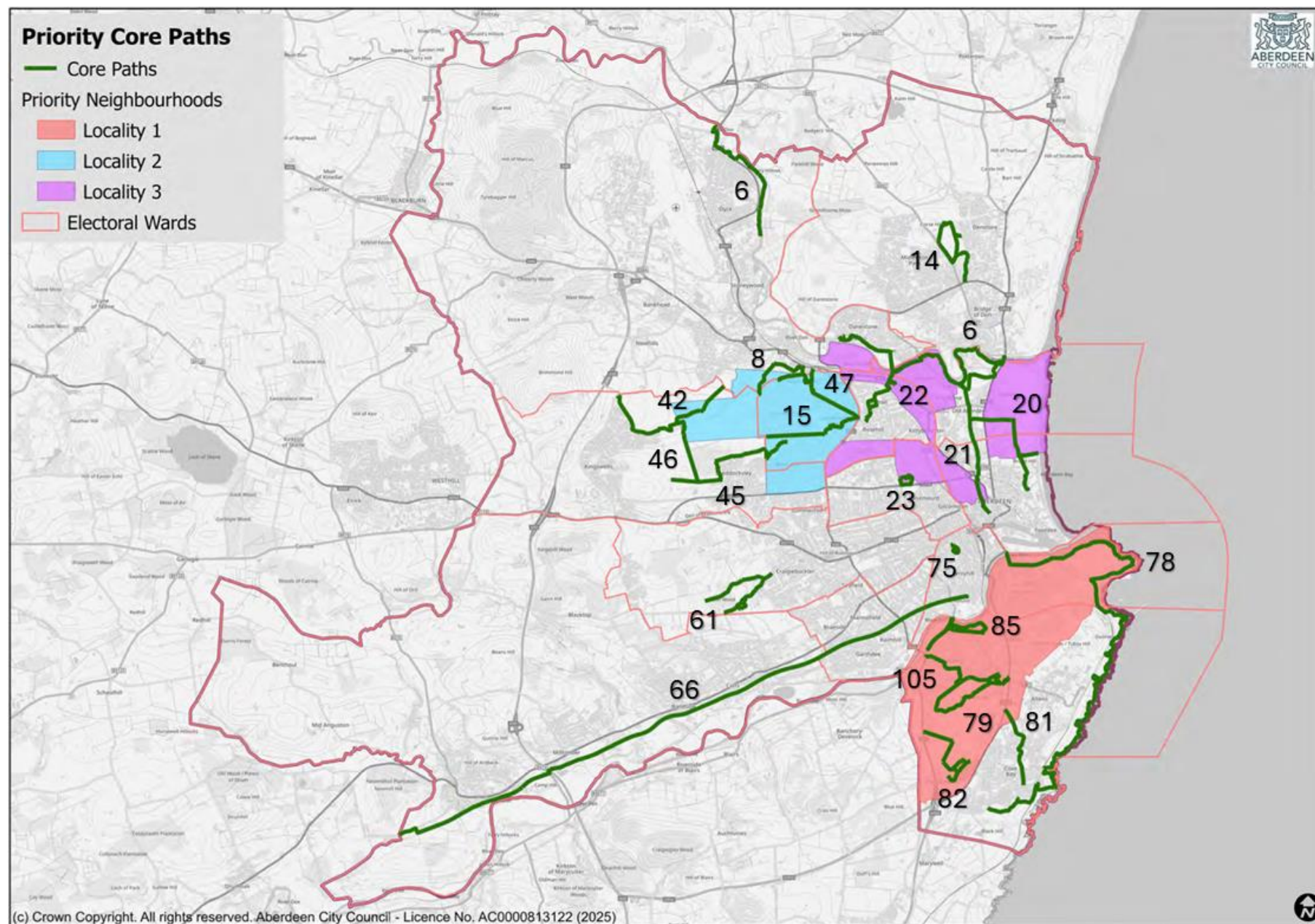
4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Approval of this Report enables Bus Lane Enforcement (BLE) surplus to be allocated to the Core Paths Investment Priorities, as outlined in the 'Bus Lane Enforcement Programme Update & Future Planning 2025/26' Report and the 'Bus Lane Enforcement and Low Emission Zone Projects 2025/26' Report approved respectively at the 19th March and 10th June 2025 NZET Committee meetings. Each year, 50% of any BLE surplus is assigned for these priorities.

4.2 Developer Obligation (DO) Funds will be matched with BLE funding where appropriate to carry out path and outdoor access improvements, maximising the use of available resources and the impacts and scope of projects.

4.3 As per the reports referred to in 4.1, Theme 2 - Core Paths / Outdoor Access – Maintenance, 10% of any BLE surplus will be made available to maintain the Core Path network. Strategic Place Planning and Environmental Services are working together to put in place a maintenance plan that helps protect and improve our Core Paths. Further details on this will be brought forward in the report recommended at section 2.3 above.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, Local Authorities in Scotland have duties to manage public access rights, including upholding these rights by protecting routes and planning a system of Core Paths to provide reasonable access throughout their areas. Approving these Investment Priorities and delivering improvements to Core Paths following these directly helps to deliver these duties.

5.2 In each project, it will be essential to ensure compliance with all applicable laws, planning requirements, environmental regulations, health and safety standards, procurement regulations, as well as accessibility and equality legislation.

5.3 Core Paths / active travel networks can support emissions reduction and biodiversity enhancements, therefore helping the Council meet its climate and biodiversity duties under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Positive impacts

6.1 Improved Core Paths can lead to increased sustainable and active travel, such as walking and cycling. This in turn can lower car usage and reduces associated harmful emissions. This shift leads to cleaner air and helps combat climate change.

6.2 Path networks with trees and vegetation offer significant benefits to biodiversity and nature networks. They create wildlife corridors that facilitate safe movement and migration of various species, promoting genetic diversity and population stability.

Path works are generally planned to be undertaken out-with the bird nesting season to avoid damage to nests and disturbance to birds.

6.3 These positive environmental impacts that improved Core Paths can deliver ties in with the Council's ambition to tackle the climate change and nature loss crises, as demonstrated through the Council's declaration of a climate and nature emergency.

<u>Negative Impacts</u>

6.4 Habitat disturbance – construction and maintenance activities can disrupt wildlife habitats along core path routes, this therefore needs managed at individual project level.

6.5 Use of Resources – path improvements require the use of materials such as asphalt, whindust / granite dust, and other aggregates. The extraction and processing of these resources can have environmental impacts.

6.6 Pollution – construction equipment can cause air and noise pollution during path improvement works, therefore this needs to be managed at individual project level.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No significant risk	Approve contents of this report	Low	**Yes**
Compliance	No significant risk	Approve contents of this report	Low	**Yes**
Operational	Risk of insufficient staff resource to deliver projects	This is viewed as low risk due to a number of teams being involved with path improvement works. This risk will be monitored through project delivery/ spend	Medium	**Yes**
Financial	This report directs the use of approved Bus Lane	Approve contents of this report which contains 21 Core Paths as Investment Priorities, this allows	Low	**Yes**

	Enforcement surplus funding, however, there is a risk around level of project delivery if this surplus changes significantly from the expected level	suitable flex to spend whatever level of funds are available each year in the most appropriate manner		
Reputational	No significant risk	Approve contents of this report	Low	**Yes**
Environment / Climate	Risk of not realising the full benefits the Core Path network could provide, with regards to climate and the environment, if improvements are not made to Core Paths	Approve contents of this report	Low	**Yes**

8. OUTCOMES

COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025-26	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement **Working in Partnership for Aberdeen**	The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement: - • Our partnership will look to ensure that citizens of Aberdeen are afforded opportunities for themselves and their families to keep fit and engage in activities to improve their health. • We seek to invest in our road and pavement network, ensuring active and green travel is at the forefront of any new projects and a review of existing transport infrastructure is progressed taking account of the need to expand the city cycle network.
Local Outcome Improvement Plan	

Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	Improvements to the Aberdeen Core Path Network directly supports the Prosperous Economy section of the LOIP. Investing in quality path infrastructure brings significant economic benefits to communities and regions, including higher property values, increased custom for local businesses, greater tourism revenue, and health cost savings through encouraging active lifestyles. Additionally, it helps reduce traffic congestion and transportation costs, while also delivering environmental advantages by lowering car dependency and associated emissions.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	Improvements to the Aberdeen Core Path Network directly supports the following Prosperous People stretch outcome: 10. Healthy life expectancy (time lived in good health) is five years longer An improved Aberdeen Core Path Network also provides opportunities for recreation, helps to promote active and healthy lifestyles, and can improve mental health by: • Encouraging exercise and physical activity by providing quality paths for walking, wheeling and cycling • Providing better opportunities for active travel and physical activity • Improving mental well-being by providing access to nature and well-connected green spaces
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	Improvements to the Aberdeen Core Path Network directly supports the following Prosperous Place stretch outcomes: 13. Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions by at least 61% by 2026 and adapting to the impacts of our changing climate. 14. Increase sustainable travel: 38% of people walking and 5% of people cycling and wheeling as main mode of travel and a 5% reduction in car miles by 2026.
Community Empowerment Stretch Outcomes	Improvements to the Aberdeen Core Path Network directly supports the following priority areas for improvement identified by respondents from the Aberdeen Open Space Audit public survey. Respondents were asked the top three reasons why

	they use, visit or enjoy the city's open spaces. The top reasons given were: 1. Physical exercise or health reasons (e.g. walking or jogging etc.) 75% 2. To be in nature 71% 3. To meet friends or family or to socialize 53% 4. To get out of the house or office (e.g. for a break) 47% 5. For mental health reasons 31% When asked what would encourage respondents to use or visit Aberdeen's green space or open spaces more often the most common reasons given were: 1. If they had better facilities (e.g. benches or toilets) 49% 2. If they were better managed for wildlife (e.g. wildlife enhancements such as tree and wildflower planting, long grass, wetlands, shrubs etc.) 45% 3. If there were more adequate paths for walking or cycling 36%
Regional and City Strategies	An improved Aberdeen Core Path Network supports objectives in a range of regional and city strategies including: Aberdeen Core Path Plan, Strategic and Local Development Plans, Local Outcome Improvement Plan, Aberdeen Adapts, Net Zero Routemap and the Natural Environment Strategy for the city as, well as the Aberdeen Local Transport and Regional Transport Strategies.

9.   IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	No identifiable data is included in this report therefore a DPIA is not required.
Other	N/A

10.   BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1   Bus Lane Enforcement Programme Update & Future Planning 2025/26 (https://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s167544/BLE-LEZ%20Programme%20Report.pdf)

10.2   Bus Lane Enforcement and Low Emission Zone Projects 2025/26 (http://councilcommittees/documents/s170018/BLE%20Programme%202425%20Report%20DD.pdf)

10.3   The Aberdeen Core Path Plan
(https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/environment/access-outdoors/core-paths-plan)

10.4   Community Planning Aberdeen Locality Plans
(https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/community-planning-structure/our-localities/ Priority Neighbourhoods)

10.5   Aberdeen Open Space Audit: 2024
(https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/environment/open-spaces)

11.   APPENDICES

11.1   N/A

12.   REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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