1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides an update on the progress in replacing the ‘Black Path’ walk and cycleway between Galashiels and Tweedbank as part of the Borders Railway works.

1.2 Scottish Borders Council and Network Rail are working together to provide a replacement route for pedestrians and cyclists by Summer 2015 in advance of the Borders Railway opening, between Galashiels and Tweedbank.

1.3 The replacement path will be sited to accommodate the new transport interchange in Galashiels as well as providing a direct route to Tweedbank railway station.

1.4 A bid will be made to SUSTRAN Community Links Project with the aim of potentially reducing costs to the Council of constructing the replacement path.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Eildon Area Forum notes the progress being made in replacing the “Black Path” walk and cycleway between Galashiels and Tweedbank.
3 BACKGROUND

3.1 As part of the Parliamentary Bill: Waverley Railway (Scotland) Act 2006, Scottish Borders Council is required to replace the well used multi-use path, known locally as the ‘Black Path’ between Galashiels, Langlee and Tweedbank, much of which will become a railway line again as the Borders Railway is constructed.

3.2 The funding of the replacement path is quite complicated. Network Rail are required to provide alternative provision for all sections of footpath they close. In some areas it was recognised at the Parliamentary Stage that this provision, while functional, did not reproduce the amenity of the existing provision. At these locations the Council are providing additional or alternative provision as part of their agreed contribution to the scheme. For this reason there is a mix of Scottish Borders Council constructing and funding sections of the replacement path, Network Rail funding and constructing sections of the path, as well as Network Rail funding replacement sections with works carried out by the Council. Capital funding of £731,000 was initially secured through South East of Scotland Transport Partnership (SEStran) to fund the Council elements of the replacement path; however regional transport partnership budgets were subsequently transferred direct to local authorities. In addition to this funding a bid will also be made to Sustrans ‘Community Links’ project fund to assist with the financing of some elements of the path.

3.3 Scottish Borders Council and Network Rail share the responsibility of replacing the Black Path, and are working together on scheduling path replacement works around the construction of the Borders Railway. It is not possible to provide an exact timetable for works as Network Rail have still to establish their exact programme of Works. Progress however is being made at present on the Council’s elements and where possible these sections will be replaced as soon as practicable. Drainage, lighting and future Galashiels Flood Prevention works are all being considered and incorporated in the replacement works as are the need for any Traffic Regulation Orders for shared footpath/cycleway.

3.4 Work has recently been completed on the Balnakiel section by Scottish Borders Council. The next section heading east to Wheatlands Road will be the responsibility of Network Rail, and will be constructed as part of the railway works. See drawing number 8000.

3.5 Wheatlands Road to Plumtreehall will be constructed by Scottish Borders Council, and it is planned to work with the Galashiels Flood Prevention team to make use of new bunding for this section of path. See drawing number 8000.

3.6 Plumtreehall to the rear of B&Q store falls to Network Rail to complete. See drawing numbers 8000 and 8001.

3.7 B&Q store to the roundabout at ASDA will be provided by Scottish Borders Council, using the existing road and footway infrastructure and a Traffic Regulation Order will be promoted for a shared pedestrian/cycleway along Ladhope Vale. Pedestrians and cyclists will be required to cross Bridge Place and George Craig Bridge using the existing traffic islands as well as Stirling Place. The design for the new Galashiels Transport Interchange will incorporate pedestrian and cycle facilities and appropriate access routes. See drawing number 8001.
3.8 The exact route of replacement path from the roundabout at ASDA to the crossing of the Gala Water to Huddersfield Street is currently being discussed with Network Rail to ensure the most appropriate route is decided upon, and where possible use the existing path. This section of path is dependent on the land area designated for the construction of the new railway as well as gradients and flooding. Scottish Borders Council will be providing this section of path, funded by Network Rail. See drawing number 8001.

3.9 Huddersfield Street to Winston Road will be provided by Scottish Borders Council and the opportunity to improve the existing path on the south bank of the Gala Water will be taken. Working again with Galashiels Flood Prevention project the path will be widened and upgraded. The route from the gas works to the top of Winston Road will see the footway widened, which will also offer a traffic calming effect with a narrower road. A crossing point will also be provided on Winston Road to allow pedestrians and cyclists to access the next section of path. Drawing number 8001 and 8002.

3.10 Network Rail has the responsibility of providing the replacement path between the new road bridge carrying Winston Road to the rear of Essenside Drive in Tweedbank. This will follow same corridor as railway on the Red Bridge. See drawings 8002 and 8003.

3.11 The Council is responsible for providing a link from the junction of Essenside Drive and Tweedbank Drive along to the new railway station. See drawing 8003.

3.12 Further paths will also be investigated to ensure Tweedbank residents can access the new station through the village safely, as well as ensuring visitors to Abbotsford House are also directed properly from the station. Links to the Borders General Hospital and Melrose are already available and a condition survey will be undertaken.

3.13 Where possible, the width of this mixed use path will vary between 2-3 metres, shall be illuminated and adopted. Drainage works and some fencing will be required along the length, and it is possible where there is a significant change in level of land some steps may need to be constructed. Should steps be required cyclists will have the option of using the existing road network as an alternative.

4 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial
At present capital funding of £450,000 is in the SBC Financial Plan for 2013/14/15 for the replacement path, this consists of £80,000 in 2013/14 and £370,000 for 2014/15. To March 2012 spend for the replacement path has been £219,000. The projected out-turn to March 2013 is £62,000.

4.2 Risk and Mitigations

(a) Scottish Borders Council and Network Rail have no option but to make provision for replacement routes as part of the Parliamentary Bill.

(b) As with any construction project there is the potential for cost overruns or land difficulties, but this is not viewed as a major risk with this particular project.

(c) There is the risk that this new path may not be as well used as the previous one due to sections being closer to carriageways, but where
possible the footways will be widened.

(d) A bid will be made to SUSTRANS Community Links project with the aim of potentially reducing the cost of the Council’s contribution.

4.3 **Equalities**

There will be no adverse impact to the proposals noted in this report.

4.4 **Acting Sustainably**

The purpose of this replacement path is to provide an alternative route to the existing path that is well used by walkers and cyclists, which has the aim of reducing car use.

4.5 **Carbon Management**

It is anticipated that journeys on foot and bike shall increase with this extended multi-use path.

4.6 **Rural Proofing**

This section is not applicable as this is not a new or amended policy or strategy.

4.7 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

There are no changes which are required to either the scheme of Administration or Delegation as a result of the proposals in this report.

5 **CONSULTATION**

5.1 The Head of Corporate Governance, the Chief Financial Officer, the Head of Audit and Risk, the Head of Strategic Policy, Corporate Communications and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted in the preparation of this report. Comments received have been incorporated in the final report.

Approved by

**Director of Environment & Infrastructure**  Signature …………………………………

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**Background Papers:**

**Previous Minute Reference:**

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