

## **INTEGRATING ACCESS CASE STUDIES**

### **EAGLESCAIRNIE MAINS**

#### ***Successful development of paths around the farm now managed under Land Management Contract, linked to village, other woodland and paths***

<b>Key facts</b>	140ha owner-occupied commercially managed mixed lowland farm with arable, woodchip, DIY horse livery, B&B and a small shoot. Grazing is let to neighbour for sheep
<b>Location</b>	Gifford, East Lothian
<b>Access issues</b>	- Potential disturbance to game and wildlife - Privacy issues around farm house
<b>Background</b>	<p>Owner Michael Williams' keen interest in conservation prompted development of grass field margins, wild bird cover, extended hedges, new woodland planting and sympathetic management of existing woodland through a variety of conservation schemes. Although fairly ambivalent to public access, Michael saw development of paths enabling bed and breakfast guests to enjoy the farm as a natural extension to conservation management of the farm and a positive mechanism for steering people away from sensitive areas. In 1992 four waymarked paths starting from the farm steading were established, promoted by simple A4 maps printed on coloured paper, funded by Lothian Regional Council.</p> <p>Although only 1.5 miles from Gifford, the burn which runs between Eaglescairn and the village, effectively isolated the farm. Consequently public access was for many years limited to the few people who chose to park their car at the farm steading and walk from there. Gifford Community Council and other local people had for some time been keen to develop a local path network. In 2002, encouraged by the local authority access officer, a public meeting was held to help identify desirable routes in the area as part of the implementation of East Lothian Council's Sustainable Path Network Strategy. Michael Williams enthusiastically supported proposals to include Eaglescairn Farm Walks and develop links between the farm and village. With the help of the access officer, Gifford Community Pathways Group secured the necessary funding to develop the network on the ground.</p>
<b>Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ To provide for public access without interfering with farm enterprises</li><li>➤ To minimise disturbance to game or wildlife</li><li>➤ To avoid conflict between public access and the farm shoot</li><li>➤ To maintain privacy around the house</li></ul>
<b>Who wants access?</b>	B&B guests and other visitors to the area People from the local village, mainly on foot, including daily dog walkers and locals looking for longer walks at the weekend Livery clients keen to exercise their horses (2-3 people riding around the farm each day) Other local riders
<b>Where?</b>	Circular walks around the farm linking to village
<b>Sensitive areas/sites</b>	Old silage pits Grain store Pheasant pens Woodland around the house Wildlife rich areas e.g. ox-bow lakes along the burn Wild bird cover strips

## Action Taken

- **Farm path development** – Grass margins around fields have been signed and waymarked. The original red-banded wooden posts and directional arrows installed by the farm cost approximately £90. Farm labour and machinery is used to mow all of these margins/paths, usually every three weeks, under Land Management Contract Tier 2 access option.
- **Link path to village** – East Lothian Council funded and were responsible for physical improvements to the path through the wood linking to the village. A contractor was commissioned to build a bridge across the burn, and formal signposts were erected at either end of the path.
- **Waymarking** – all paths on the farm are waymarked.
- **Leaflets** detailing walks around Gifford, including Eaglescairn Farm Walks, were produced by the local community group in conjunction with the local authority access officer and local primary schools. These are distributed through the local pub, shop, post office and accommodation providers, with a copy of the map posted in the local shop window
- **Advance notices** are erected at key access points notifying shooting dates. A4 sheets printed from the computer are laminated and stapled to the bridge at negligible cost. These have been welcomed by walkers
  - “Please be aware
  - We are shooting at Eaglescairn on xxxx
  - Thank you for your co-operation”
- **Advisory notices** were initially erected to let people know when and where pesticides or fertiliser had been applied to grass or crops but this was quite time consuming and as most people stick to the paths, notices are no longer erected
- **Farm walks** led by farmer twice a year which are advertised locally generate tremendous interest.
- **Community involvement** – during path development a successful open day hosted by Eaglescairn combined path and conservation work with fundraising for the local path group.

## Benefits

- ✓ Path network has created enjoyable access opportunities now used daily
- ✓ By following waymarked paths deliberately designed to avoid sensitive areas, there is no conflict between public access and farming, conservation or shooting
- ✓ Documented path network makes risk assessment far easier
- ✓ Demonstrates to the public good practice with respect to multi-objective land management

## Keys to success

Creation of paths which provide interesting and enjoyable access around the farm  
Clear waymarking

Hedge cutting alongside the main paths creates a dense physical barrier which encourages people to keep to the path and avoids disturbance to wildlife and game in the adjacent wood. Annual cutting is also important to maintain the full width of the track to facilitate access.

Farm walks provide an opportunity for valuable interchange between farm and public and allow local people to learn more about what is happening on the farm, which in turn fosters understanding and mutual respect.

## Lessons learned

- ❖ “Development of the path network is a way of sharing and showing off everything we love so much about the farm”

- ❖ “Make use of what you’ve got – existing fences, good hedges – to help steer people along paths which provide good opportunities to enjoy the countryside without conflicting with farming, conservation, shooting, privacy or safety”
- ❖ “Sit down and think where people want to go, where you are happy for them to go, areas where public access might conflict with other interests, and natural routes which could be developed for public access. Make a plan or jot it down on a farm map and you’re nearly there.”
- ❖ “Initially I was very cautious about the Land Reform Act but actually it has reinforced the benefits of action we’d already taken to positively manage access on the farm”

**Future plans**

As and when funds allow, erection of a bridge across the ford towards Bolton would create a circular route offering further scope for improvement of the local path network.