

# **East Lothian Councillors back plans to protect public right of way**

**A public path which existed for over a century, linking John Muir Way and Yellowcraig Beach, had to be diverted after developers built housing across it.**

The path has been considered a public right of way by locals for generations. However a meeting of East Lothian Council's administration cabinet this week heard that the land the path crossed at New Mains, Dirleton, was bought by a new owner five years ago and planning permission granted to build three houses on the site.

Planners included a condition on the housing which required the developer to create an alternative public path before the homes could be built, which was done.

Now council officers want to protect future access to the path by diverting the public rights access from the original path to the new one, or creating a new path agreement with the current landowner.

The meeting was told that the path featured on maps dating back to the early 1900s and the previous landowner welcomed its use by the public, even putting up signposts and maintaining it.

But a council officer told the meeting when the land changed

hands in 2018 the signs disappeared.

He said permission was granted for three houses on the site with a condition that the developer had to build an alternative route for the right of way and during that time the community gathered enough evidence to prove it was a right of way as it was not on any register.

Despite this he said: "The current landowner has always disputed that it is a right of way and continues to do so.

"We are looking to secure this route by one way or another, proving the original route was a right of way or constituting new public access rights on new path."

Councillors were told talks were ongoing with the landowner over ensuring the path remained public and safe.

Some local concerns had been raised about the width of the alternative gravel path, which is 1.5 metres wide, but officers said the width was "a fairly standard specification for a countryside path".

Councillors unanimously agreed to approve officers' plans to ensure public access on the alternative path and praised their efforts to reach an agreement.

Cllr Colin McGinn said: "This work goes on all year round to ensure we maintain rights of way and people have access to walking in our beautiful county.

"I am forever grateful we have a group of staff willing to work with landowners to ensure our county remains open and safe."

*by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter*

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New Mains Steadings, Dirlerton, with the John Muir Way (blue), was built on public path (green) but developers built an alternative route (red) pic ELC website