

West Lothian villagers unite in fight for footpath link

A “island” village’s campaign for improved safer footpaths has been thrown a lifeline by neighbours who want to see a ‘missing link’ opened between the two communities.

East Whitburn residents joined villagers from Stoneyburn and members of local walking groups at a meeting to discuss how best to press for building of the final few yards of a footpath to link their communities.

A survey in East Whitburn showed more than 500 people regularly use the Foulshiels footpath and supported its completion to Hens Nest Road.

Stoneyburn has fought for years for improved footpath access in and around the village. It’s a problem shared by those in East Whitburn.

The main road connecting the two villages is the narrow and winding B-road, Hens Nest Road. It is only an eight-minute drive, but a risky hour-long walk.

Frustratingly there’s only a few hundred yards gap between Hen’s Nest Road and the footpath built by the Scottish Woodland Trust through Foulshiels Wood to Stoneyburn.

Walking that route would take around 15 to 20 minutes.

While most of the pathway has been finished it stops within sight of Hens Nest Road. You could almost throw a stone from

the farm gate to the road.

Since the pathway was built many more villagers from Stoneyburn have been using the Foulshiels path for daily exercise, but to get to East Whitburn you still need to walk, or cycle Hens Nest Road.

At a meeting held by the Stoneyburn and Bents Future Vision Group last week members of a local walking group told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that their regular walks have to start with a bus journey to get out of Stoneyburn to access the existing paths network in the rest of the county.

Stacey Johnstone who runs a local community group, Bash Community Buzz, from East Whitburn who attended the Stoneyburn meeting to offer support for the work said: "Money is not an issue. The Woodlands Trust wants the path built to East Whitburn. It would connect to all other pathways up to Whitburn and beyond."

Stacey told the LDRS: "The numbers we have seen increase using the path have been phenomenal. We walk the path every day and we knew a certain number of people, but we are seeing more and more new faces. Even people coming from Blackburn and Whitburn to walk in the area."

Sandy Edgar who leads the campaign in Stoneyburn has made a video to show to the council to highlight the local support for the project. He told the LDRS: "It really is the case that if you build it, people will come. People will use it."

Many parents are keen to see the pathway finished because it would complete a safe cycling route for Stoneyburn children who attend Whitburn Academy or St Kentigern's in Blackburn.

The council has been in negotiations with landowners, but agreement has yet to be reached and villagers fear that stalemate will see the Missing Link plan whither and disappear as other planned pathways in West Lothian prosper.

Villagers in both communities are determined that doesn't happen.

Safe routes for cycling, walking and wheeling are a priority for the council's Active Travel Plan set to be agreed as a blueprint for developing a path network for the next five years.

Core to the Active Travel Plan is encouraging people away from short car journeys and towards a more active lifestyle.

Stacey and fellow East Whitburn campaigner Gwen Kempik who also attended the Stoneyburn meeting, and others occasionally walk Hens Nest Road, but do so reluctantly.

It's a B-road but people speed. It has blind bends and is dense with roadside growth. There's also additional traffic at the moment with new housing being built on the road.

"It's a nightmare... it's dangerous," said Gwen.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter