Irvine Bay - Following a Green Network Plan

Irvine Bay comprises of 22km of coastline and includes the towns of Ardrossan, Saltcoats, Stevenston, Kilwinning, and Irvine. The area has a proud history of tourism and industry, including coal mining, ship building and chemical works. However, the industrial decline of the late Twentieth Century has presented considerable challenges to the area and its population, including unemployment, social exclusion and deprivation. Industrial decline has also resulted in significant areas of vacant and derelict land and much of the area's open space is under-used and neglected.

**Context**

Irvine Bay Regeneration Company delivers social, environmental and economic improvements to an area of North Ayrshire which has struggled with economic decline and environmental neglect. A key tool for the Company is a consistent green network strategy which identifies a series of local level greenspace improvements that, together, can deliver the ambition of wholesale regeneration for the area.

“North Ayrshire Outdoor Access Forum welcomes the substantial improvements made to outdoor access in the Irvine area by the Irvine Bay Green Network Project. These works have created improved opportunities for active travel and physical activity throughout Irvine for all ages and abilities making the town more attractive and accessible.”

**Project Background**

In 2005, North Ayrshire Council commissioned an economic analysis of the Irvine Bay area to identify the current economic and physical issues and to develop a strategy for urban renewal. The recommendations of the report set out a vision for the area and explored options for their delivery.

After a full appraisal of available options, the report concluded that an Urban Regeneration Company would be the preferred delivery vehicle to facilitate the level of transformational change required and to act as a catalyst for stimulating investment and starting the process of economic recovery.

In October 2006, the Irvine Bay Regeneration Company opened for business. Its principal role is the physical and economic transformation of the area. Through this, and by creating the conditions for sustainable
private sector investment, it seeks to facilitate the process of economic recovery leading to increased employment prospects for residents and a turnaround in the fortunes of the area.

**What it did**

Working in partnership with Forestry Commission Scotland, the RSPB, SNH and greenspace scotland, Irvine Bay Regeneration Company sought to develop a framework for the delivery of green network projects. In 2010, a £20,000 grant was received from the CSGN Development Fund for the creation of a Green Network Strategic Action Plan. Paul Hogarth Company was commissioned to create a strategic context for the implementation of green network projects.

Five different types of underused land were analysed in the report and proposals to enhance the environmental and community benefit of these spaces were reviewed. The sites included derelict industrial land, open beach space, large development sites and land with high environment value. A detailed and costed Action Plan was produced which considered the feasibility of a number of options including: temporary greening, short rotation coppicing, wetland creation, wildflower planting and path and access improvement. The Plan also sought to engage the wider community and to encourage the active use of greenspace in and around Irvine Bay.

In August 2011, the Irvine Bay Regeneration Company commenced work on a series of projects to deliver some of the ideas presented in the Green Network Strategic Framework. These included the Irvine Beach Park - a programme of physical green infrastructure improvements supported by a comprehensive community engagement study.

Another project was the Irvine New Town Trail - a 20km circular route of paths which provides off road routes to schools, connects communities to the town centre and creates wildlife corridors and pleasant green spaces. Local young people were involved in these

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**Key Points**

- In 2005, North Ayrshire Council commissioned an economic analysis study of the Irvine Bay area. The resultant report recommended the creation of a development organisation to drive forward change. In 2006, the Irvine Bay Regeneration Company opened for business to realise the area’s environmental and economic potential.

- Irvine Bay Green Network Strategic Action Plan was commissioned in 2010, this analysed different types of underused land and considered proposals to enhance the environmental and community benefit of these spaces.

- Implementation of the Plan started in 2011. Across both the beach and town centre areas, this activity included path improvements, wildflowers and shrub planting, new signage and seating, and the installation of an outdoor gym to encourage visitors to be more active.

- In 2012, work was undertaken to improve the environment around businesses and employment sites. This resulted in a new footpath and associated planting in the Irvine Enterprise Area, encouraging people to walk to work.

- Local young people were involved in the outdoor regeneration works, undertaking training as part of the implementation of this project and learning new skills.
works, particularly in path building and woodland and wildflower planting, learning new skills in the process.

In 2012, work was undertaken to improve the environment around businesses and sites of employment. This has resulted in a new footpath and associated planting in the Irvine Enterprise Area which encourages people to walk to work.

**CSGN Learning**

Funding contributions from the CSGN Development Fund, were important to help initiate and maintain momentum in the development of the project. From a CSGN point of view, the project demonstrates the potential of local level green networks initiatives as vehicles to deliver on-the-ground environmental, social and economic regeneration.

It also shows the value of creating green network action plans which are supported by key partners including the Local Authority, the business community and local residents. This strategic approach identifies and prioritises series of discrete improvements which can be implemented as and when funding can be obtained. Together, these individual elements help to deliver the wider objectives of the local regeneration company.

**Future**

A longer term programme of improvements and further development of the Irvine Bay Green Network is planned for future years. In partnership with North Ayrshire Council, new paths are planned to connect the Irvine Enterprise Area with the national cycle route and create safe pedestrian and cycle routes into Irvine Town Centre and the railway station.

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**Outcomes**

**Improved Community Cohesion:** Local residents have been engaged in the regeneration proposals and design process. Since improvements like the Irvine Beach Park have been completed, the overall image of the area is much improved. People feel safer walking though the network of paths and participate in recreation in the open spaces.

**Better Environment for Wildlife:** The project has improved the biodiversity of the area by planting wildflowers, trees and shrubs - all with local provenance. In doing so it has improved wildlife corridors and helped to create an integrated habitat network.

**Employment and Training Benefits:** The project has provided a boost to the economy of Irvine Bay by working with local contractors and by providing valuable training and work experience for local young people who were previously unemployed. Furthermore, it has also created a more attractive environment for businesses to move to and invest in.

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“Irvine Beach Park and Ardeer Quarry through the Irvine Bay Green Network Project have improved the image of both areas and local communities’ perceptions of safety and confidence in using these areas. The path works have made both locations more accessible for everyday journeys which enables local communities to connect with the sites and have an increased pride in the local area. This will improve local communities’ health and well-being in the long run and improve their appreciation of the natural environment.”

Louise Kirk, Access Officer, North Ayrshire Council.
Location
The location of Irvine Bay in North Ayrshire is shown in the map below within the context of the CSGN area.

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What is the CSGN?
The CSGN is a national development within the National Planning Framework which aims to make ‘a significant contribution to Scotland’s sustainable economic development’. It involves public agencies and stakeholders (those with an interest in our work) working together to align their policies, programmes and actions to achieve a common aim. That aim is to change the face of Central Scotland by restoring and improving the rural and urban landscape of the area.

Getting in Touch
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For further information on other case studies please visit: www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org

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