

PLATFORM

Walkers could be the big losers from plans for the coastal path

Bangor man PAT CARVILL celebrates the wonderful North Down Coastal Path and urges councillors to think 'very carefully' before committing to changes that would see a significant increase in cyclists using the path.

ILL health did me a good turn. As a small child I was somewhat sickly.

"He has a weak chest," said the doctors whose advice was clear — the smoky air of Belfast was not good for me. "Take him to the seaside," they said.

And so my parents moved to Bangor and it was perhaps the best move they ever made. It is well over 60 years ago, but I can still remember the excitement of a new house, a new school, and new friends.

walk for miles on a safe path through some wonderful wild coastal scenery.

Having made the move, my father was determined that I should get the maximum benefit from it. Every weekend he would take me round the coastal path. Heavy rain might keep us indoors, but not blustery winds. "Come on," he would say. "This will freshen you up". (Actually, he used a more earthy metaphor, but the meaning was the same).

coast. Invariably they are enchanted by it, and comment on how lucky we are to have such an attractive asset on our doorstep.

Much has changed in Bangor since I first came here, but the coastal path is still much the same. Indeed, it is not very different in appearance today than in the Edwardian postcards which show Bangor in its tourist heyday.

But most of all, the excitement of a new town, one that was on a more human scale and one where the shops and streets ran right down to the shore. And one where you could

It was the beginning of a lifetime habit. Pickie, Brompton, Stricklands, Crawfordsburn became the companions of my youth, and I still do not tire of them. Whenever we have visitors I take them round the

But there have been some changes. There is more housing development along the path than ever before, most of it in the last ten or twenty years, and much of it of fairly poor quality as far as external appearance is concerned. Most people would agree that the planners have something to answer for. That is not to say that any part of Bangor, or anywhere else for that matter, should be frozen in time. But we should seek to retain the best of the past, and to minimise any adverse impact where change is needed.

Some years ago the greatest change that I can recall to the coastal path itself happened when cycling, which used to be forbidden, was authorised. It is easy to see why it was allowed. Cycling is healthy, it is useful exercise, and it is particularly pleasant for families with young



The author enjoying the coastal path in the 1950s at the instantly recognisable Long Hole.



A section of the coastal path.

children to be able to make an excursion together and have a gentle cycle in the open air. No one begrudges cyclists their place in the sun.

But the change has not been without its problems. The volume of cycling has increased as word of the attractiveness of the coastal path has spread among more enthusiastic cyclists. As well as the family groups we now have mountain bikes and faster machines. Some of these are considerate, but many are not. Few have bells, so the unwary walker can easily be caught out, with only the squeak of brakes to warn of an approach. Few seem to know about pedestrian priority, or to have any concept of an appropriate speed. Enforcement of the relevant bye laws seems to have been impossible.

I am reminded of these memories as I view the current plans to reconfigure the coastal path as a part of a new Greenway. The council is currently considering proposals to broaden the path, straighten it in places and tame some of the wilder bits with planking and bridges. The purpose of this is to encourage more cycling, for commuting as well as for recreation.

Councillors come in for a lot of abuse. I have been taken aback by the sort of language used, and the insults hurled, on Facebook and the like. I am quite sure that councillors make mistakes. Most of us do. But in my experience the great majority of councillors are

genuinely motivated by a desire to improve the environment for their constituents and residents generally.

Those who rant against the

proposals would involve a probably irreversible change in the nature, atmosphere, and usage of the coastal path. If the path is re-engineered it will look very different from what it does today. If it attracts significantly more cycling (and that is the whole point of the exercise) it is hard to see how that could co-exist with the current level and nature of walking. One thing is sure: walking the path — which is one of the most heavily used in Northern Ireland — would become a much less peaceful and stress-free experience.

If the only consideration was to promote cycling, at any cost, the answer would be easy. But I hope that that is not the policy. So the real question is who would lose out, and does that matter? I think a lot of people would lose out. Young children and older people are the most

obvious losers, but the generality of walkers would also have a diminished experience. There are other options for cycling, but there will never be another facility like the coastal path for walking.

What will future generations think if we adopt the Greenway proposals? Will they feel that we have enhanced the path, or will they view it as a scar on the landscape? Will they thank us for turning it into a cycleway, or will they regret the change?

I find it very concerning that we may be about to do long term damage to a unique asset, one that is used and enjoyed by many thousands of people every year. I hope that councillors will consider very carefully the likely losses as well as the gains if this part of the Greenway were to go ahead.

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Council Invites Entrepreneurs to Register for Social Entrepreneurship Programme Information Session!

Social entrepreneurs are being invited to register for a place on the information session on 11th October at North Down Borough Council's Social Enterprise Partnership Programme (ANISEP).

Submitted to take place at Bangor's Sigurd Centre on Friday 11 October from 10.30-11.45am, the session will provide the future details about the programme which is designed to help social entrepreneurs start a business as well as encourage existing social enterprises to grow.

The Mayor of Ards and North Down, Alderman Bill Keery, said:

"It's exciting to see that the ANISEP programme, which is the first of its kind in the region, will be able to coordinate the positive support of social and community sector organisations and agencies in the borough.

It is of great benefit to the social enterprise sector and provides a great opportunity for us to support the business."

The programme offers assistance in the starting-up, marketing and business plan development as well as business planning support and advice to participating groups, helping them to develop their business. It can also help groups in the training and consultancy services to business social enterprises.

Brian Doherty, Director of Business Start Workshop, said:

"Participating in ANISEP allows us to explore areas of the business and financial aspects. We developed the business



Emma Drury (Director, StartUp Print Workshop) with the Alderman Bill Keery (Mayor of Ards and North Down) and Susie McCullough (Director of Regeneration, Development and Planning). Photographer: Colin Maxwell

we collect social, health and wellbeing, and the legacy of that work has allowed us to extend our capacity."

"We have employed a dedicated team of the Wellbeing Development Officers", stated through The People Foundation, and we are also considering to deliver corporate wellbeing projects through to various organisations."

ANISEP has a successful track record with a total of 117 participants taking part in the 2016-18 programme. They were able to secure more than £1.5m in funding and 17 jobs were created as a result of the programme.

To register your place at the information session, visit www.ards.gov.uk/ANISEP.

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