



## **SUMMARY**

Ben Nevis and Glen Nevis are nationally important resources for recreation and tourism, as well as providing a valuable community landscape. The core aim of this project is to bring essential infrastructure development to support a more socially inclusive approach to outdoor access: encouraging greater participation and removing barriers.

The project will also ensure that a 'once in a lifetime' visit to the UK's highest mountain does not only welcome and provide for the fittest mountaineers. Families, the elderly, less fit and mobility impaired all have a right to be able to enjoy this landscape and engage in suitable outdoor activity.

This project will ensure that access infrastructure is of a standard befitting a world class destination, that it is inclusive and built to withstand the pressures of climate change and thousands of visitors. The Glen Nevis Visitor Centre and the associated visitor experience will be tangibly enhanced, with a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to access bringing environmental, economic and social benefits. The path will provide opportunities for outdoor activity, education and engagement with the natural environment. It will develop our natural capital and build social inclusion while contributing more generally to people's health and wellbeing.



## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The path between the Visitor Centre Bridge and the Youth Hostel Bridge currently presents an access barrier to wheelchairs, buggies, push chairs and mobility impaired user groups. Moreover, it is unfitting for a national attraction to not accommodate the needs of multiple user groups.

The Visitor Centre is the central hub and first point of call for visitors to the area. It provides the only public convenience facilities in the Glen along with a substantial car park. Yet upon arrival there is no 'attractive' alternative to the very serious undertaking of the Ben Nevis Mountain Path.

Whilst there is an existing path line along the Eastern bank of the river, it is: degraded, with rotten bridges spanning the burns; seriously eroded with sections undercut from flood action; thin, muddy and uninviting; lacking in signage and/or orientation; uneven and full of trip hazards. In short, the path is in serious need of upgrading and the erosion is significant, both in terms of visual degradation and impacts to the riparian environment.

The current footbridge is unsuitable for all-ability access and presents a physical barrier to a range of user groups. The structure is ageing, needs regular repair and is susceptible to 'bouncing' - with a maximum of 5 persons allowed at any one time it is unsuitable for the high density of visitors regularly encountered. The maximum loading is routinely exceeded by a factor of 2 and occasionally higher. Moreover, the bridge is poorly located and pulls visitors away from the Visitor Centre. This presents a serious issue in terms of people missing vital mountain safety information as well as educational messages regarding environmental impact reduction.

## **LOCATION**

Detailed Survey Sheets (see appendices) provide the exact locations of all specified works.

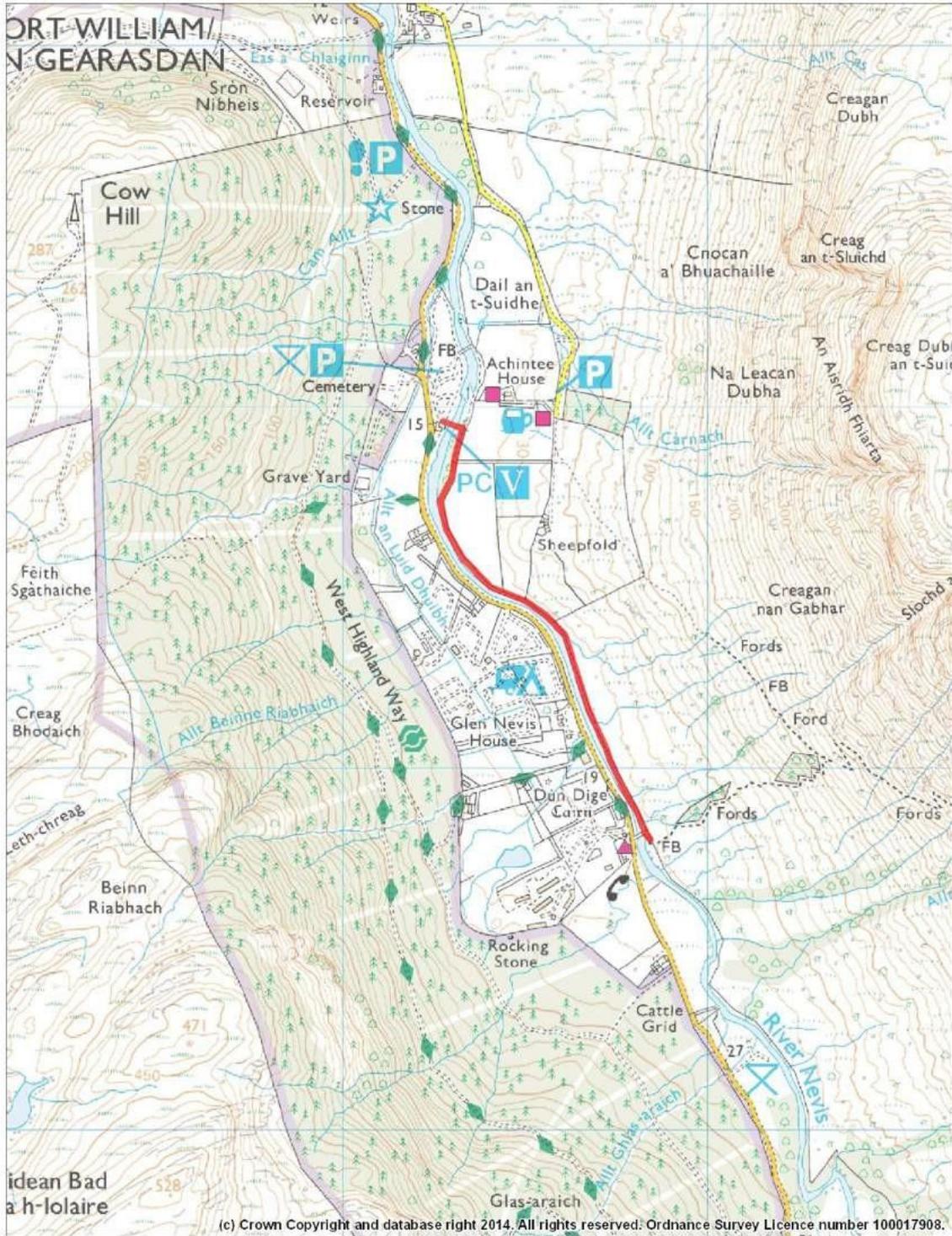
The bridge requires a detailed site-survey in collaboration with SEPA to locate its exact location. This will be close to the Visitor Centre and link with the Eastern Bank at a point opposite to where the Ben Nevis Mountain Track turns perpendicular to the river and begins to ascend.

The path then continues in a South/South-Easterly direction for 1.5 km staying within a few metres of the river bank. The path ends at the Youth Hostel Bridge.

Access to the site for construction purposes is limited and will require helicopter drops. The site is within a National Scenic Area, and has SSSI and SAC designation.

See **Maps** – overleaf.

# Riverside path

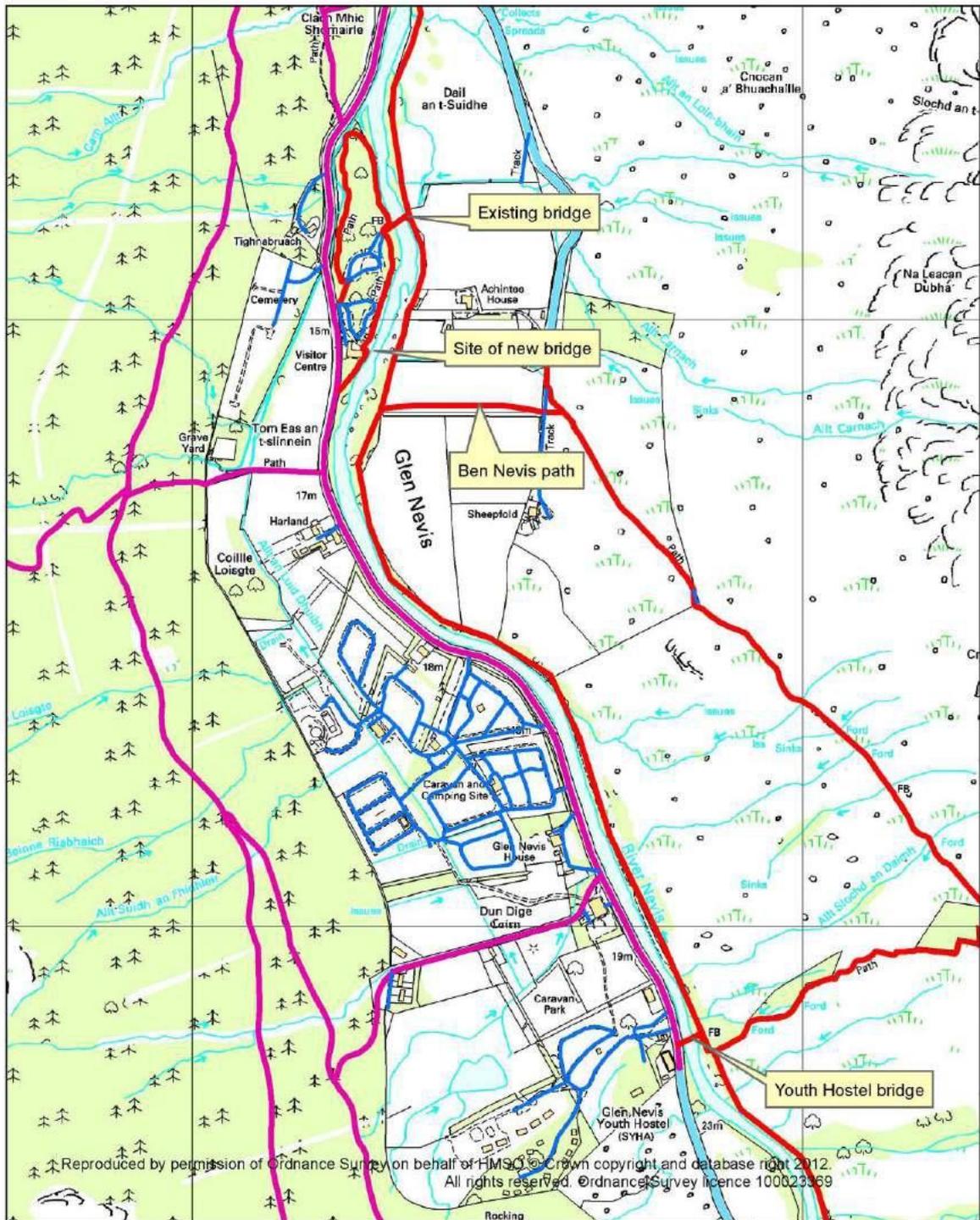


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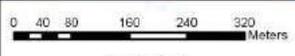
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Glen Nevis Riverside Path



1:8,000

Ref:  
Date:

## OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the investment are:

- 1) providing inclusive access and engaging new audiences
- 2) improving visitor experience
- 3) contributing to healthy lifestyles
- 4) improving community resources and quality of life
- 5) protecting the riparian environment
- 6) increasing safety, engagement and learning

*The project also contributes to the core NLP Scheme Objectives:*

<b>Scheme Objectives</b>		
Protect and enhance landscape character for future social and environmental benefit	1	√√
Encourage responsible access and mitigate visitor impacts	2	√
Strengthen ecosystem resilience and plan for future adaptation	3	√
Connect people with the landscape through meaningful and memorable experiences	4	√√
Increase learning and appreciation of cultural heritage	5	
Support community participation in conservation and visitor management	6	
Increase knowledge, skills and employability in conservation and eco-tourism	7	
Increase public awareness of the importance of biodiversity, ecosystem services and environmental pressures	8	√
Adopt a partnership approach to visitor/land management, which is future focused, adaptive and landscape-scale	9	√
Develop the local economy in a sustainable way	10	√√
Contribute to health and wellbeing by encouraging and improving access to the outdoors	11	√√
Provide an example of best-practice in sustainable nature-based tourism	12	√√

The landscape character and environmental quality of one of Scotland's most prestigious National Scenic Area's is currently degraded by serious erosion around the riverside path, particularly the area adjacent to the Visitor Centre. This area is environmentally important with SSSI and SAC designations. Furthermore, the area provides the visitor with a first encounter of the iconic environment they have travelled to. Visitor perspectives and attitudes are likely to be informed by this first impression, both in terms of landscape quality and the quality of visitor management.

The proposed all ability path/board-walk aligns with a zoned approach to development and visitor management. The Visitor Centre is the core access hub for the entire landscape. Infrastructure (in the form of car parking, toilets, visitor centre and bridge) is already established and appropriate to the high density of traffic in this location.

It is vitally important that commitment to high-quality, inclusive access is demonstrated in one of Scotland's key outdoor destinations. The All-ability Path will deliver this national objective within a locally zoned strategy. It will also protect the immediate environment from heavy footfall and divert some of the pressure away from the Ben Path. Furthermore, it offers a valuable alternative for the many visitors and local community who are unable to, or do not wish to, make the arduous journey to the summit.

## DELIVERABLE OUTPUTS

- Upgrade 1.5 km of path between Visitor Centre and Youth Hostel bridges
- New Bridge suitable for all-ability access (also bringing visitors directly to the Visitor Centre, vital information and to the start of the Ben Nevis Path)
- 6 bridges crossing tributaries
- Full specifications for wheelchair users and Path built to withstand predicted impacts of visitor numbers and climate change such as increase in flood intensity
- Careful and sensitive landscape design to blend the path in with the natural environment curving around trees

## OUTPUT INDICATORS

Outputs will consist of:

1.5km of riverside path built to all-ability path specifications

New bridge spanning the river Nevis, built to all-ability path specifications

Output indicators are detailed in the bill of quantities and will be further specified in the detailed design plan.

## OUTCOMES

### National Outcomes:

The partnership investment of the HLF scheme alongside the landscape's high profile and nationally iconic status provide a unique opportunity to deliver across a range of Scottish Government's National Outcomes. The following categories are all addressed within this proposal:

- **Environment** – protecting riparian ecology and landscape character; divert intensity of foot traffic away from the Ben Path; reduced visitor impacts
- **Communities** – providing infrastructure which benefits all the local community
- **Sustainable places** – A future-proof, all-ability path and bridge, resilient to impacts such as climate change and to changing social needs.
- **Healthier lives** – encouraging outdoor access and activity for a wider range of people
- **Inequalities** – all-ability access for mobility impaired and less experienced/confident walkers or those less physically fit/able.
- **Children, young people and families** – providing family friendly walks, suitable for buggies school groups, local walkers, runners and dog owners
- **Older generation** – providing suitable walks to maintain an active lifestyle
- **National identity** – developing a gold standard visitor experience catering for all in a world class destination which exceeds expectation
- **Public services** – assisting the Council and other stakeholders in improving public access to their natural capital; increased public engagement with mountain safety and other types of information.

## **ACTIVITIES & TIMETABLE**

**STAGE 1:** Invite tenders for final design of bridge and path (May 2015)

**STAGE 2:** Award design contract (June 2015)

**STAGE 3:** Obtain detailed permissions, draw up final construction and project management contracts and invite tenders (Aug 2015)

**STAGE 4:** Award construction contract (Sep 2015)

**STAGE 5:** Site preparation, material and helicopter logistics (Oct 2015)

**STAGE 6:** Phase 1 construction of Bridge (winter 2015 to spring 2016)

**STAGE 7:** Phase 2 construction of Path (winter 2016 – spring 2017)

**STAGE 8:** Final inspections and remedial work to site

## **EVIDENCE, REVIEW & REPORTING**

During the construction phase the project will be reviewed by: an external CMD consultant; the NLP Paths Project Manager; the NLP Scheme manager; the Highland Council Access team, The Highland Council Projects and Faculties team, the NLP Executive Committee & Board.

Evidence will be in the form of the final works being signed off as having been built to the indicated specifications contained within the design plans.

Monitoring Visitor Numbers

The Council currently use people counters on a number of path, following completion of the bridge/all abilities project we could make use of these to monitor usage.

## **HERITAGE CONSERATION**

The All-ability Path will significantly improve the riparian habitat of this section of the river Nevis, protecting biodiversity and helping to stabilise the river bank. The specifications will ensure the path is forward looking and built to future-proof the environment and the infrastructure.

Providing a meaningful, high-quality alternative to the Ben Path will spread visitor impacts in a controlled and zoned way. This will reduce the intensity of impact on the mountain and assist in developing a sustainable approach to tourism and recreation management.

## **BENEFICIARIES & COMMUNICATION**

### **HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES:**

The main beneficiaries of the investment will be those Highland communities who enjoy the area's outstanding scenery and wildlife. Many local communities value the Glen as a location for family strolls, dog-walking and shorter runs. For many highland communities, as well as visitors, the Ben Path is not the main or only attraction.

However, the wider national-scale benefits to Scotland should not be underestimated. Scotland presents itself as a world leader in tourism, with unrivalled heritage and natural landscapes. Ben Nevis and Glen Nevis undoubtedly command a unique position within Scotland's portfolio, and as such should be expected to deliver a gold standard in visitor experience and environmental quality.

### **HEALTH BENEFITS:**

Shorter, circular walks are more appropriate than the Ben Path for many people to access this landscape. A recently completed piece of commissioned research and a public consultation (NLP Community Consultation & Visitor Survey, CRTR, 2013) has indicated that more low-level walks, with interactive elements are needed and would be highly valued in Glen Nevis.

The health benefits of outdoor recreation are significant and now widely documented, encompassing physical exercise and mental wellbeing. A short, all ability circuit would facilitate a wider range of people being able to get close to nature, relax and enjoy some exercise.

### **INCLUSIVE ACCESS:**

It is important that the social and health benefits associated with outdoor activity are offered to as wide an audience as possible. For many visitors, reaching the summit of Ben Nevis is not a safe or realistic option. It is vital, therefore, that a range of appropriate options exist. Physical access must be improved to allow all ages and all abilities equal opportunities to engage actively with this inspiring environment.

### **LOCAL ECONOMY:**

The thrills and challenges presented by the UK's highest peak, some of its steepest cliffs and most impressive winter sports pull a significant number of activity tourists to the Highlands. Equally, the tranquillity, wildness and natural beauty of the landscape attract a wide range of tourists, encompassing: wildlife tourism, geotourism and ecotourism. A full spectrum of businesses, ranging from accommodation providers to outdoor activity providers, capitalise on the many attractions of one of Scotland's most emblematic landmarks.

### **PROJECT BUY-IN**

The project has been endorsed by Paths for All, the Lochaber Disability Access Panel, Torlundy Community Council, Glen Nevis Residents Association and the Fort William Community Council. The NLP Board and members are all supportive of the project, with specific endorsement from Rio Tinto Alcan (the land owner of the Eastern Bank), Forestry Commission Scotland and the Highland Council.

### **PROJECT LEAD / PARTNERS**

This project has evolved through a process of stakeholder dialogue, community consultation, research and analysis. The original round one proposal was for a path going from the visitor centre to the Lower Falls bridge.

Two main objections to this were uncovered. Firstly, that past the Youth Hostel bridge, the landscape character becomes much wilder, and that an upgraded path would impact negatively on this aspect. Secondly, that the path would still be unsuitable for all-ability access and would not really appeal to families or mobility impaired user groups.

Through more detailed consultation there was consensus that a far better and more targeted use of investment would be to have a high specification, all-ability access path. The existing bridge however acts as a barrier, and along with many other reasons highlighted above, has been identified as unsuitable and in need of replacement. The added value of this is multifold – with increased safety and education of visitors, alongside reduced environmental impacts.

Finally it is worth noting that the NLP have endorsed the approach of focusing on long-term sustainability, resilience, adaptability and future-proofing. Therefore, a shorter, but higher specification path, which serves a much wider range of audiences and reduces barriers is seen as more valuable than the initial proposal. This approach leaves space for future development which can respond to environmental and social change as well as reducing the need for maintenance.

## **CONTRACTORS ETC**

All contracts will be awarded in accordance with both HLF and public procurement guidelines, including where relevant Highland Council Standing Orders.

Key contractors will include

- A CDM coordinator
- Structural
- Engineer/Designer
- Surveyor
- Bridge Construction Path
- Path Construction

## **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

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## BUDGETS

	Description (see bill of quantities and contractors prices)	Cost	VAT	VAT
Path	Detailed Design Plans	£8,500	20%	£1,700
	CDM Co-ordinator	£5,000	20%	£1,000
	Legal fees	£4,000	20%	£800
	Full build: 900 metres	£45,000	20%	£9,000
	Heavily rooted ground, surface build : 400m	£18,000	20%	£3,600
	Benched section: 100m and Stone Revetment: 75m	£3,000	20%	£600
	Culverts: 24 at 300mm twin wall 3m length	£5,500	20%	£1,100
	Tree Removal	£2,000	20%	£400
	Fencing: 250m new/replaced and removal of original	£2,000	20%	£400
	Cost of material delivered from Banavie quarry:	£22,000	20%	£4,400
	Burn-crossing Bridges (supply & delivery)	£23 000	20%	£0
	Burn-crossing Bridges (fitting)	£15,000	20%	£3,000
	Airlift 500Tonnes from Nevis Range to site	£74,000	20%	£14,800
	Loading of Helicopter Bags	£15,000	20%	£3,000
	Upgrade access ramps on Youth Hostel Bridge	£23,000	20%	£4,600
	Additional: stone to be collected 60 tonnes	£4,500	20%	£900
	<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£246,500</b>	20%	<b>£49,300</b>
Bridge	All-ability access bridge over river Nevis (see report from URS Infrastructure & Environment UK Ltd)	£256,000		recoverable
	<b>Total</b>	<b>£502,500</b>		<b>£49,300</b>

## PERMISSIONS & COMPLIANCE

Permissions will be required from landowners – The Highland Council and Rio Tinto Alcan, both of whom have a long history of working with the Nevis Partnership. THC is currently working with RTA to establish a lease/path agreement for the period of the NLP scheme to assist in the delivery of the project.

As a notifiable project, planning permission will be required – consultation indicates this will be widely supported by stakeholders and the local community. Additionally all works and method statements will need to be reviewed and approved by SNH and SEPA for any environmental impacts – the project has inbuilt contingency to address any such issues. Additionally, SNH are an advisor to the Partnership, being both a strong supporter of the scheme and key funder.

Assistance and collaboration are to be expected.

An independent CDM Co-ordinator will assist the NLP paths Project Manager in ensuring that all Health and Safety requirements are met by contractors, engineers and designers.

## **LEGACY & MAINTENANCE**

The focus on sustainable investment is significant within this project. The high specifications and design brief will ensure that longevity and resilience are built into the path and bridge.

The real legacy of the project will be the positive impact on hundreds of thousands of visitors over the years. A greater range of people taking outdoor exercise and engaging with natural heritage. Reduced impacts on the Ben Path will go hand-in-hand with a better educated public, particularly with regards to mountain safety and environmental information.

The bridge and path, with the associated parking and toilets, will provide a valuable resource for local schools for years to come and facilitate 'learning outside the classroom'.

## **RISK & RISK MITIGATION**

All contractors will be required to work to current industry standards and HSE guidelines on risk management and reduction.

Formal risk assessments will be provided for all contracted activities and informed/reviewed through an appointed CDM Co-ordinator.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The idea of developing the Glen Nevis Riverbank into an all-abilities route (on the North East side of the river between the Visitor Centre and Youth Hostel footbridges) has existed for at least the past 10 years. A report with survey sheets, specification and estimates of costs was produced in 2004(?) by the Nevis Partnership. This report did not lead to any work being carried out. However the site is very similar now to what it was then, with the exception of 10 years of tree-growth and some further riverbank erosion. Therefore the survey sheets are largely still valid with some minor adjustments. As was the case 10 years ago, the key obstacles that need to be overcome before an all-abilities path can be viable are:

1. The current footbridges are not suitable for wheelchairs hence will need replacing with ones that are.
2. Parts of the riverbank are eroding and/or can flood when river is in spate. This is particularly true of the first 200m along from the Visitor Centre Bridge.
3. To ensure that the new path does not flood, some sections will need to be moved further away from the river on land currently occupied by the adjacent fields. (This will involve negotiating with both the landowner and farmer).
4. The location of the path (on the opposite side of the river to the road) presents access difficulties for delivering the large quantities of material required to build the path.

With these obstacles unchanged the same overall proposal is now being revisited. One key development in recent years has been Highland Council's interest to replace the old footbridge with a new one located 200m upriver and close to the Visitor Centre.

## Advantages of a New Bridge located close to the Visitor Centre

1. The current footbridge is over 40(?) years old and every year it needs expensive repair work to keep it safe.
2. The first 200m of path beyond the current bridge is one of the most problematic sections along the whole route. A new bridge that crosses by the Visitor Centre will miss-out the whole of this 200m section.
3. The Current footbridge lies at the opposite end of the car park to the Visitor Centre building. Therefore, people who park at the footbridge end of the Car Park are less likely to detour across to the Visitor Centre to get important information about being prepared for the weather conditions and the path ahead (this mainly applies to the Ben Nevis enable the Visitor Centre to provide a more effective service to the thousands of visitors that come here).
4. The new bridge could resolve the access difficulties of delivering materials to construct approximately the first 500m path beyond the bridge, providing the new bridge was made strong enough to enable small dumpers to be driven across it. Once constructed, and with the current footbridge still in use, the new bridge could be utilised as the access route for transporting aggregates for the path beyond the bridge. (Due to the large numbers of people who will be on the completed bridge during busy periods it will need to be made strong enough to support heavy loads anyway).
5. If a new bridge was constructed on the site of the current footbridge there would be a period when there would be no access across the river. Constructing a bridge on the new site would not interrupt access.
6. The new bridge will need to have a single span of about 35 metres to avoid disturbance to the gravel beds in the river below – which is a salmon spawning area.
7. The type of bridge that Highland Council had considered was not suitable for wheelchair use. In order to meet the all-abilities requirement a new design for the bridge must be sought.



The Nevis Partnership, An Drochaid, Claggan Road, Fort William, PH33 6PH  
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