



Parton Kirk Strategic Context Assessment

March 2023

Front Cover photograph credit: [Parton Kirk - Scotlands Churches Trust](#)

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Introduction

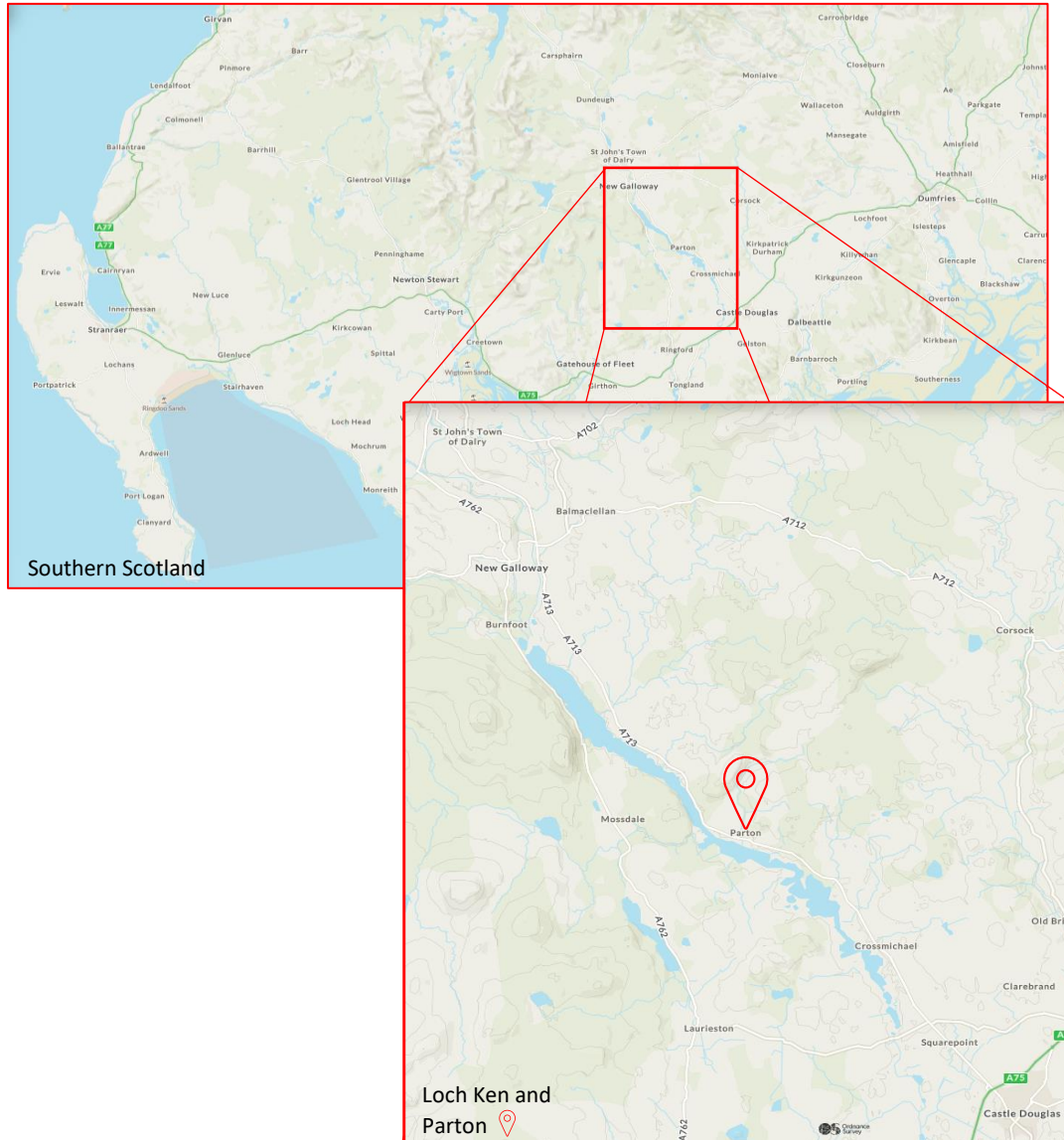
This report has been commissioned by Parton Community Council (PCC) to consider the strategic context that a project – Parton Kirk and James Clerk Maxwell Centre - they are evaluating will operate in.

The project centres on the future of Parton Kirk - the burial site of renowned mathematician and scientist James Clerk Maxwell (JCM) - which, following recent decommissioning, the community understand is to be sold.

The PCC have commissioned a concurrent assessment of potential business case for Parton Kirk including the integration of a JCM visitor/science centre.

Location

Parton is situated in the middle of the eastern shore of Loch Ken. Nine miles in length, running from the Glenkens to the outskirts of Castle Douglas, Loch Ken constitutes the largest body of freshwater in Southern Scotland.



Map 1: Location of Parton and Loch Ken within Southern Scotland.

Loch Ken is an increasingly popular visitor destination, offering a wide selection of outdoor activities and cultural experiences. In recent years, the Loch has witnessed a low level of investment in visitor infrastructure, with a constraint developing on the number of visitors that can be appropriately hosted. This came to a peak in the summers of 2020 and 2021 when spikes in visitor related access issues were recorded, particularly connected with wild camping and access rights being exercised irresponsibly. While there was certainly a link to the pandemic, there is an underlying longer-term trend of increasing visitor management challenges in the area.

National Strategic context

National Tourism Strategy

[Scotland Outlook 2030](#) is the national tourism strategy and aims to establish Scotland as the world leader in 21st Century tourism. It was developed through an equal partnership between the Scottish Tourism Alliance, Scottish Government, VisitScotland, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland.

The strategy development was guided by a steering group and built on a robust evidence base and engagement with over 2500 tourism leaders and stakeholders. The Strategy was launched on the 4th of March 2020.

Outlook 2030 – A summary

The Vision – We will be the world leader in 21st century tourism.

The Mission – Together we will grow the value and positively enhance the benefits of tourism across Scotland by delivering the very best for our visitors, our businesses, our people, our communities and our environment.

Key Priorities – Our passionate people, our thriving places, our diverse businesses, our memorable experiences.

Our Commitments – For each of the key priorities there are an agreed set of commitments. These commitments will ensure delivery on the vision to be the world leader in 21st century tourism.

Download a copy of the strategy:



The strategy is intended to influence regional and sector planning, and so the direct links to Parton, the future use of the Kirk and the JCM centre are limited. However, there are clear links to the priority areas: thriving places and memorable experiences.

Tourism Megatrends

Megatrends describe the global shifts in views and behaviours displayed by our visitors. The Scottish Tourism Alliance grouped and characterized the most relevant of these global trends in the Scottish context as:

Experience More	offering more genuine experiences and helping visitors to be more than “tourists”.
Limitless Discoveries	marketing the whole of Scotland not just the favourite places.
Evolving Traveler	recognising the many different types of visitors, both culturally and demographically
Technology to Stimulate and Inform	using widely available technology to improve and influence the customer experience.

Table 1 – Scottish tourism mega trends, source: [Scottish Tourism Alliance/ Scottish Enterprise](#)

Further work by VisitScotland Insights department published in Feb 2020 noted the specific trends that would characterize the 2020’s including:

- Loco-motional Travel and the Eco-Drive – *the rise of the green and low carbon agenda.*
- Transforming the Typical – *disrupting the market through product development.*
- Solivagant Spirits and the March of the Global Nomad – *the importance of the individual traveller.*
- Rise of the Reviewistas – *advocates, ambassadors and referrals.*
- Pre-crastination – *getting everything done in advance.*
- Water-ways – *capitalizing on the appeal of Scotland’s coasts and waters.*

These trends were described prior to the COVID 19 pandemic. Euromonitor research suggests that the trends have endured. The pandemic also saw several other trends emerge which are of note; especially the shift to “staycation”, the drop-off of the international visitor market, increases in cycling and other adventurous activities and a continuation in the shift towards more ethical and environmentally conscious decision making.

Whilst these are global trends, they relate well to the development of further visitor infrastructure and experiences in Parton. Specifically, highlighting the link to JCM will resonate directly with Global Nomads offering a unique experience and insight. Beyond the Kirk and JCM, Parton is well placed to respond to the Water-ways trend and Locamotional and Eco-Drive visitors.

National Planning Framework 4

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is part of the statutory development plan and directly influences planning decisions and Local Development Plans adopted by each Planning Authority. NPF4 replaced NPF 3 in February 2023. The new framework sets out a vision for how Scotland will change in the future. It reflects priorities from across Scottish Government portfolios and brings together a wide range of plans, programmes and policies.

The framework establishes several spatial principles and action-areas that seek to build a climate-conscious and nature-positive future and respond to the needs of communities across Scotland.

Download a copy of NPF4



The following statements and priorities offer high level endorsement to Parton and the wider area ambitions:

- National Development Statement 8 - National Walking, Cycling and Wheeling Network
- To deliver sustainable places, Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Plans in this area should protect environmental assets and stimulate investment in natural and engineered solutions to climate change and nature restoration, whilst decarbonising transport and building resilient physical and digital connections.
- To deliver liveable places, Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Plans in this area should increase the population by improving local liveability, creating a low carbon network of towns and supporting sustainable rural development.

Regional Strategic Context

Dumfries and Galloway Local Development Plan (LDP2)

The Dumfries and Galloway Local Development Plan (LDP2) sets out how and where land and property will be used in Dumfries and Galloway to realise the vision for the next 20 years. The written policies give guidance on all aspects of development, when it will be supported and when it won't. The current LDP (LDP2) was adopted on 3 October 2019 and replaces the previous plan adopted in 2014.

The overarching principle of the plan is that all development proposal should support sustainable development, including the reduction of carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions. The LDP2 Action Plan was Published in May 2022. The Action Programme lists all the actions needed to deliver the policies and proposals contained in LDP2, when they are expected to be delivered and who will take the lead in delivering them.

As NPF4 has now been adopted, Dumfries and Galloway Council have 5 years to revise the Local Development Plan to reflect the new guidance. This process was anticipated and in November 2022 the Council published the Development Plan Scheme, which lays out the process the Council will undertake to develop the next LDP, LDP3.

There are no direct references to Parton or Loch Ken in LDP2 or the Action Programme. However, the Development Plans Scheme references the future importance of Local Place Plans which may be of particular note to the Parton Community and could usefully link to the furtherance of this project. See extract below.

Regardless of whether this project progresses or not, it is appropriate for Parton and the wider GlenKens Community to consider if the development of a Local Place Plan is beneficial.

Local Place Plans Local Place Plans (LPPs) are a new tool by which communities can engage in the production of LDP3 by producing a plan for their locality, which must be taken into consideration by a planning authority when preparing an LDP. While the regulations set out the legislative process, they leave scope for different approaches to consultation and production. For each LPP to be taken into account in the LDP process, the LPP must be finished by early 2025.

Information and guidance have been published for community groups who are interested in producing their own LPP (www.dumgal.gov.uk/local-place-plans). Additionally, procedures are in place where communities can seek assistance from the Council and its partners. This process of support is designed to be flexible so as to respond to issues as they arise.

Development Plan Scheme, November 2022, 14th Edition. Page 6.

Download a copy of Dumfries
and Galloway LDP2



South of Scotland Destination Alliance

The [South of Scotland Destination Alliance](#) (SSDA) is the strategic Destination Management and Marketing Organisation for the South of Scotland, encompassing Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders. Their ambition is to transform the South of Scotland not a year-round world class destination, growing tourism spend in the region to £1Bn by 2030 and creating an additional 6500 jobs.

Their key priorities are:

- Establishing 'Scotland Starts Here' as the destination brand for the region, developing short and long term marketing plans targeting both domestic and international visitors. This is on the back of the MBTAG activity delivered to date through Midlothian and the Scottish Borders and will now also include Dumfries and Galloway
- Engaging members on a local level and working closely with the industry on recovery, product development, business readiness and future workforce education
- Strategic destination development planning, focused on understanding the region's longer term needs to inform capital and infrastructure investments
- Working actively with local communities to demonstrate the value of the tourism sector and to cement its part in the place-making activity of the South
- Working closely with South of Scotland Enterprise and representing the needs of the industry amongst local and national governments

Visitor facilities development in Parton will naturally align with the SSDA ambitions. Noted above, the SSDA are seeking to understand and support communities to unlock sustainable tourism opportunities that improve placemaking. They are also focused on strategic destination development and seeking to inform wider tourism infrastructure investment.

The Kirk and Parton, in and of themselves, will not be strategic in the sense that SSDA developments will be viewed. However, in light of the wider work of the Loch Ken Strategic Visitor Infrastructure Framework (SVIF) and the physical location of Parton – and indeed the Kirk within that – this potential development, if nested in a wider area concept or programme of work, may actually have strategic consequences or opportunities associated with it.

It would therefore be prudent, should this project move on another stage, to highlight this opportunity to SSDA as a potential component of their wider strategic development.

Loch Ken Plan

The Loch Ken Plan (LKP) developed by the Loch Ken Trust (LKT) is framed using the United National Sustainable Development Goals and highlights three major themes: People, Prosperity and Planet. Across these areas and the 19 goals that sit behind them, the aim is to nurture Loch Ken and the surrounding area into a thriving set of sustainable communities.

Download a copy of the
Loch Ken Plan



The Prosperity strand of activity being championed by the Loch Ken Plan could be tightly aligned to a development in Parton or at the Kirk. Specifically, a development in Parton could contribute to the following goals:

- **Loch Ken Active Travel Network** – through improvement of the disused railway and offering a “hub” or “nodal” point to support the development of the network. This is also noted in the SVIF, explored later in this document.
- **Improving Sanitation** – through inclusion of public toilets in any development. This may be useful to any development anyway to generate another income line to support their maintenance as a fee can be charged simply through the use of contactless payments.
- **SVIF** – through the development of visitor infrastructure that improves the offering to visitors and links experiences across the area and up and down Loch Ken.
- Parton is situated in a strategically significant position within the Loch Ken area. At the midpoint on the eastern shore, any development would almost certainly act as a key link in a network solution to active travel, to sanitation and to wider visitor experiences/tours and journeys.

In the context of the Loch Ken Plan, Parton appears to offer a strategically significant opportunity to wider regional development. Regardless of the community decision to progress with a development or not, the strategic assessment should be highlighted to regional partners including LKT and the group of stakeholders who are aligned with the LKP ambitions.

Glenkens and District Community Action Plan - 2020

The Glenkens & District Trust sponsored the creation of a Glenkens and District Community Action Plan which was published in 2020. The action plan covers the Balmaghie, New Galloway & Kells, Dalry, Balmaclean, Corsock & KPD, Parton and Crossmichael Community Council areas. It sets out an overall goal:

“That the Glenkens will be a connected, resilient and carbon neutral place, where people will want to live, work and visit, to bring up their families, and to grow old.”

The action plan has four themes (below) with short, medium and longer term goals associated with them.

- A connected community
- An asset rich community
- An economically flourishing community
- A carbon neutral community

A development in Parton, whilst not identified as a direct action, could contribute to a number of these themes.

Download a copy of the Glenkens Community
Action Plan Executive Summary



Loch Ken Strategic Visitor Framework

The Loch Ken Strategic Visitor Infrastructure Framework (SVIF) establishes a set of policies and principles that will inform and guide the long-term development of visitor infrastructure across the area.

The SVIF aims are:

- To respond to current and emergent visitor pressures
- To support the development of a high quality, integrated and seamless visitor experience across the Loch Ken areas
- Support the delivery of the Loch Ken Plan.

The SVIF will also nest within and support the delivery of the broader Biosphere and South of Scotland approaches and ambitions.

The plan does not carry the status of a Local Development Plan but does provide potential developer a clear sense of the ambition and direction of development the communities around Loch Ken seek to follow. It should therefore offer a firm anchor point for developers – including PCC - to build their approaches from.

The policies and principles are:

Policy 1 – to consider alternatives to new or additional capacity ahead of committing to infrastructure development.

Policy 2 – to enhance, protect and restore the natural capital of the Loch Ken area as part of visitor infrastructure developments wherever possible

Policy 3 – to refresh, extend or repurpose existing capacity in preference to brand new developments.

Policy 4 – We will develop a networked infrastructure approach, considering Loch Ken as a destination rather than any single node, venue or community in isolation.

Policy 5 – We will adopt the use of zoning to reduce pressures of multiple activities in one space and to support behaviour change. We will support differentiated infrastructure development across these zones.

Policy 6 – We will seek to inform behaviours to address visitor pressures through the development of a strong area identity and the use a signage system.

Policy 7 – We will develop infrastructure and signage that encourages low carbon, low impact behaviours and increased dwell time.

Principle 1 – to target market segments that display low impact, low carbon, and high dwell time behaviours.

Principle 2 – to target developments and opportunities which enhance our natural capital, build on our strengths and focus on market segments with desired behaviours.

Development in Parton aligns very strongly with these principles and should therefore secure support in principle from the parties who drew the framework together including Dunfries and Galloway Council, Galloway Glen Landscape Partnership, LKT and VisitScotland.

Development in Parton could be a critical link in the wider ambitions of the area and so should be highlighted as such to this group of partners. If the Council were minded to adopt the project this would also open up an avenue of investment from the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund as part of the next steps for SVIF activity.

Policy and Principles Alignment

Policy 1 – to consider alternatives to new or additional capacity ahead of committing to infrastructure development.

Policy 2 – to enhance, protect and restore the natural capital of the Loch Ken area as part of visitor infrastructure developments wherever possible

Policy 3 – to refresh, extend or repurpose existing capacity in preference to brand new developments.

The opportunity to redevelop the Kirk and to build upon and enhance the existing infrastructure links well to policy 1. Contribution to Policy 2 is less obvious, but with careful design the policy can be achieved at a local level. There is also opportunity to showcase the natural assets and capital of the area in the services provided by the development. Development at the Kirk aligns strongly with Policy 3 and will allow the heritage of the area to be showcased effectively in doing so.

Policy 4 – We will develop a networked infrastructure approach, considering Loch Ken as a destination rather than any single node, venue or community in isolation.

Geographically, Parton's situation lends to being an essential link in a networked approach to infrastructure and service provision. At present the networking across the Loch Ken area is limited. Active travel routes are fragmented and the bias of access is towards car based journeys. A nodal

development in Parton (linked to gateway development near Castle Douglas and the development of the eastern shore active travel corridor, would be transformative to the area and support visitors and communities alike.

Policy 5 – We will adopt the use of zoning to reduce pressures of multiple activities in one space and to support behaviour change. We will support differentiated infrastructure development across these zones.

Parton sits across the zone boundaries and could support zonation through separation of the shore based offer. Currently all provision is through the public slip, which congests that area and has been causing increasing visitor management problems. An offer to the south of Parton could divert some of this pressure.

In addition the owner of the viaduct, is open to development ideas which position the viaduct as a part of a journey, rather than a destination in its self. To open that avenue of development stopping points which are separated from the viaduct are necessary. Mossdale (with further development) already has the potential to offer services beyond the viaduct and link to the much wider area offer for walking and bikes. A development to the south of Parton could work in harmony with the Mossdale offering and support the viaduct owners ambition to avoid congestion on the viaduct and immediate area.

The development/offer at the south of Parton could include a view point of the viaduct which would further enhance the incentive to view rather than stop on the viaduct and also address a notable gap in provision on the east shore (the almost total absence of easy access view points).

Policy 6 – We will seek to inform behaviours to address visitor pressures through the development of a strong area identity and the use a signage system.

Any development at Parton would be able to support this, and the physical provision of options to encourage dispersal – noted above – would compliment policy 6 effectively.

Policy 7 – We will develop infrastructure and signage that encourages low carbon, low impact behaviours and increased dwell time.

A development in Parton is well placed to support policy 7. The SVIF includes the table 1 below which notes several examples of actions or activity that would accord with the policy. A development in Parton could embrace all of these – some however may be less desirable in Parton's specific context (aires and pump out facilities for example).

Table 1 from the SVIF

Low Carbon	Low impact	Increased dwell time
• Park and ride facilities • Reduced parking spaces • Car Park Charging • More active and accessible travel routes • E-charging and greater access to electric or active modes of travel • Public transport integration	• Bin provision (all painted) • Aires located in communities not out of town • Area pump out facility • Toilet provision at key nodes and signage to support good decision making in areas with no public toilet (What to do when you need a poo) • Interaction with ranger or volunteer (on site ranger or volunteer)	• Car Park charging • Switch to active travel • Interpretation and viewing platforms • Activities • Food and drink

Development as a primary destination and node on the active travel artery envisioned by the wider regional plan would meet policy 7 and effectively unlock the concept for the whole area. Specifically:

- The development of a visitor centre and a view point with short walk near/on the Loch would notably increase dwell time and address gaps in the wider provision in the area. Linked development of food and drink provision would enhance this further and could lead to a stacked set of income lines which may be able to underpin the long term viability of the development (car park fee, toilet fee, food and drink, visitor centre).
- This could be taken a step further and if Loch shore access can be linked to the development then the offer for slow-adventure activities could be integrated (open water swimming, stand up paddle boarding and wildlife watching for example).
- Within the food and drink offering there is a specific opportunity to enhance the night-time economy offering of the Loch Ken area (a restaurant and/or a performance venue for example). At present this is very poorly serviced, with limited provision of a mixed quality. The holiday park to the north of Parton, has c. 900 guests most nights from Apr through to October. This effectively increases Parton population by a factor of 6. This is an immediate pool of custom that could underpin any venture into this space.
- Loch Ken Trust has invested in developing a ranger provision, current that is a floating arrangement augmented by support from Loch Ken Marina to facilitate the registration of craft accessing Loch Ken. A development at the south of Parton could offer a focus point for ranger activity being well places to service the wider Loch Ken area and further supporting the displacement of visitors from pressure points to better provision.
- At a more local level, the provision of electric car charging points, capitalising on the existing public transport (bus) links and incorporating a public toilet would all further this aim and improve the overall visitor and community offer in Parton.

Principle 1 – to target market segments that display low impact, low carbon, and high dwell time behaviours.

Principle 2 – to target developments and opportunities which enhance our natural capital, build on our strengths and focus on market segments with desired behaviours.

The SVIF noted 4 specific themes associated with these principles as opportunities:

- Wildlife and environment
- Built and cultural heritage
- Cycling and adventure
- Accessibility

Development in Parton, of the Kirk will support principles 1 and 2 and would cater directly for two of the target themes (built and cultural heritage and accessibility). The development could also cater for the other two target themes through integration of active travel facilities and a viewing platform.

View Points

As noted above a view point is an effective way to increase dwell time – a behaviour sought by the Loch ken SVIF. There are remarkably few view points of Loch Ken and almost none easily accessible by car on the eastern shore. The mound just to the west of Parton Kirk has one of the best views of the Loch. Development of a view point there could link powerfully with the future use of the Kirk. The view point itself could be a feature and amplify some of the key attributes of the local built and natural heritage and link to the wider brand and identity project captured in Principle 6. Some examples of this are illustrated below.



Sources: (L to R)

- 1 - [Unique partnership delivers multiple health and wellbeing benefits from NHS greenspace \(worldlandscapearchitect.com\)](#)
- 2 - [The Pyramid Viewpoint | Architect Magazine](#)
- 3 - [East Brackley Viewpoint, Loch Leven - Icosis](#)

Conclusions

Parton, and Parton Kirk within the village itself, sit in strategically significant position within the wider Loch Ken and Glenken environs. At the mid-point on the eastern shore, on the disused railway and with access to outstanding views of Loch Ken there are considerable and unique geographical advantages to this location.

Will thoughtful development the reimagined use of Paton Kirk and the immediate surroundings could unlock a set out outcomes that benefit the wider region. This could include:

- **A key destination on the active travel artery;** working in conjunction with a gateway towards the south of Loch Ken near the A75, Parton would be an excellent initial destination for a walk or bike ride before continuing over the viaduct and on towards Mossdale.
- **Regional visitor management;** alongside development of the public slipway a development to the south of Parton would alleviate existing and growing visitor pressures at key points on Loch Ken, could fill provision gaps (public toilets) and could act as an base for wider ranger activity.
- **Deepening of the scientific and natural heritage offering of the area.** Extending the James Clerk Maxwell offering to encompass wider scientific features of the area (i.e. hydro-power, wind-power biodiversity etc.) could see Parton develop as a scientific/nature counterpart to the cultural and arts regional development that the CatStrand already offers. It could also offer a focal point for some partner activity (including Drax and the Biosphere) to tell the wider story of Loch Ken and the Glenkens.
- **Improvements to the regional visitor offering.** In addition to a themed visitor experience (Science/JCM centre) the development could address gaps in provision for visitor including a lack of night-time economy options (restaurant or performance events), a lack of view points on Loch Ken's eastern (and more accessible) shore and a limited food and drink offering outside of New Galloway and Castle Douglas.

The development of Parton Kirk as a single community activity is the subject of another report and may be challenging to achieve. However, there is considerable merit in regional actors considering Parton, and the pending sale of Parton Kirk, as an opportunity to meet there wider strategic ambitions.