

## **DALMELLINGTON CARS CONTRIBUTION TO THE WIDER SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC & REGENERATION STRATEGIES**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Dalmellington is located in an area renowned for its outstanding natural environment where tourism is a growth industry and opportunity to exploit this is plentiful, however the lack of tourist infrastructure is preventing the town from capitalising on, and benefitting from, this growing sector. With the achievements of the Community Led Action Plan already in place, strong leadership is now required to tackle these more difficult issues and advance the aspirations of the community.

East Ayrshire Council's Local Development Plan identifies the CARS as a key way of tackling some of the vacant and run-down buildings in the town-centre, creating a focus, and acting as catalyst to encourage more discussion, further strategic planning and ideally more action regarding outstanding issues in and around the town. The sustainable ethos inherent in any CARS wholly supports the criteria of the designated Galloway and South Ayrshire Biosphere of which Dalmellington is a key town in a key location.

This report illustrates the existing developments that are already drawing visitors to the area and those with the potential to be developed further offering even greater tourism opportunities. Dalmellington has a history of strong community-led projects & action and already has a number of successful social enterprises and projects running within the town. Recent consultation has indicated that the community is wholly supportive of developing the tourism offer in and around the town and are committed to maximizing the towns potential in this regard. A newly formed Community Development Trust would be the ideal vehicle to steer the community to meet its aspirations while working with the Galloway and South Ayrshire Biosphere to achieve their mutually compatible aims.

A **Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS)** is an essential catalyst required by Dalmellington, a town that in the past has and continues to suffer from severe economic deprivation. The community is engaged and supportive of the proposal and are in the early stages of forming a **Community Development Trust (CDT)** to work with the CARS in taking forward some of the opportunities and initiatives the appraisals and feasibility studies have identified.

A CARS for Dalmellington would be entirely consistent with the vision of the local community, that of Scottish Governments Regeneration Strategy and that of the Galloway and South Ayrshire Biosphere in that it will: -

- actively support a community which, over an extended period of time, displays clear signs of deprivation and disadvantage;
- contribute to town centre regeneration and vitality;
- help create and support jobs (and thereby support community wellbeing) in new and recently established businesses, and

- to foster a sustainable economy and society

A CARS for Dalmellington would readily support all 3 of the Scottish Government's Regeneration Strategy's outcomes:

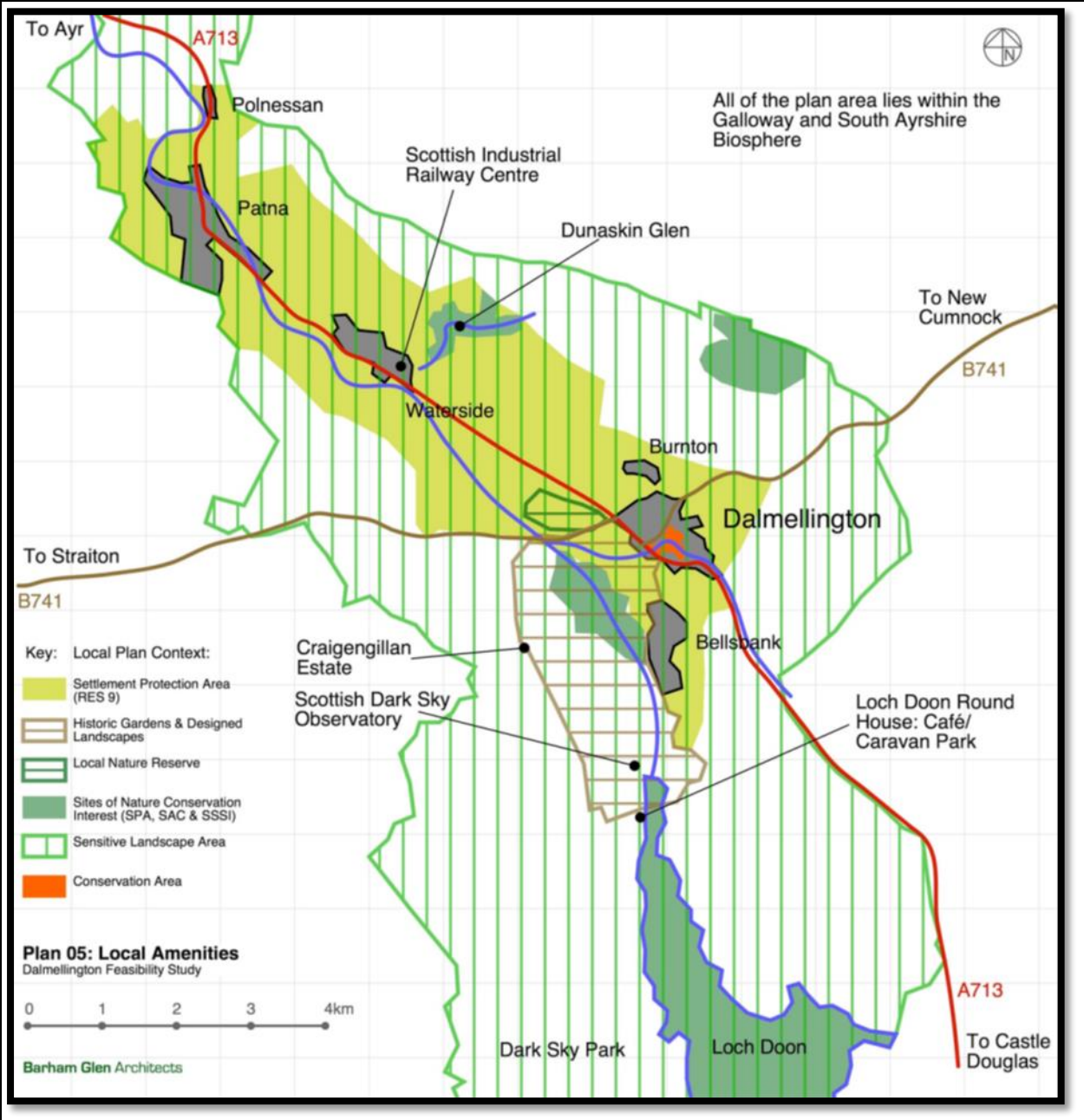
In terms of **ECONOMIC REGENERATION** it will help the local economy by supporting growing businesses and social enterprise; it will improve the physical infrastructure available within the town; it will bring new life into the heart of the town and it will encourage employment and therefore reduce welfare dependency;

In terms of **PHYSICAL REGENERATION** it will conserve and re-use a number of buildings and structures within the town; it will encourage the upgrading of interiors within historic properties; these will contribute to the vibrancy and attractiveness of the commercial heart of the town; and

In terms of **SOCIAL REGENERATION** it will involve working closely with the existing community organisations through partnership, it will encourage local people to participate in improving their own physical environment; it will respond to local needs and will support community aspirations established in the current Community Led Action Plan and the development of the new Action Plan.

In terms of planning and regeneration strategies a CARS for Dalmellington will be fully consistent with, supportive of and complimentary to the Dalmellington Parish Community Action Plan 2012-2017 along with East Ayrshire Councils newly adopted Local Development Plan where the vision is that *"East Ayrshire will be a desirable place in which to live, work, invest and visit"* and where Dalmellington *"will have established itself as a visitor friendly town, making the most of surrounding tourism and environmental opportunities"*. The sustainable development which a CARS creates supports the Spatial Strategy of the LDP. Successful place-making is also supported through CARS, and CARS is cited in the Plan as a catalyst for Town Centre Improvements to raise developer confidence in the area and the Tourism policies give particular support to sympathetic development which enhances the tourism offer of Dalmellington. The Dalmellington CARS, will also be supported by Built Environment Policies for Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Scheduled Monuments, together with the emerging Conservation Area Appraisal.

The Biospheres goals of **Conservation, Learning and Development** are also consistent and complimentary with CARS – with CARS supporting the Biospheres purpose of **"testing and demonstrating sustainable development on a regional scale"**. A Dalmellington CARS will be the first CARS opportunity in Scotland to operate within a Biosphere providing a unique opportunity for knowledge exchange, networking, awareness raising and promotion in partnership with each other.



## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

Dalmellington Parish lies at the most southern tip of East Ayrshire, 15 miles from Ayr on the A713 Ayr to Castle Douglas Road, which is part of the stunning Galloway Tourist Route. The main settlements are Dalmellington, Bellsbank and Burnton. Bellsbank, approximately half a mile from Dalmellington, was originally built between the wars to provide housing for miners, and is now a community in its own right.

The most recent estimate (2010 Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics) shows the population of the area at around 2,800. This is split fairly evenly between Bellsbank and Dalmellington. While the population in Dalmellington has stayed steady over the last 10 years, there has been a decrease in the population of Bellsbank, falling from 1,629 in 2001 to 1,409 in 2010. Shire Housing the local Housing Association has around 20% of housing stock vacant in the area and are having to examine ways to reduce this figure including student lets and reconfiguration.

Bellsbank has a much higher percentage of children (around 21%) than Dalmellington (around 12%), but the percentage of children is falling in both areas, and the percentage of older people is increasing. In fact, the percentage of pension age population is now higher in Dalmellington than in the rest of East Ayrshire and Scotland. This could be due to the number of care homes in the area and the lack of employment opportunities for young people.

Mining was the mainstay of the economy until the 1970s when pit closures had a devastating effect on local employment and the economy. Combined with subsequent decline in employment in manufacturing and in forestry, and the recent collapse of the remaining open-cast mining, this has resulted in three generations of worklessness for some families.

The main local employers are now the 2 care homes in Dalmellington and 2 in nearby Patna. There are over 50 local businesses and Craiggengillan Estate also provides training and employment for local people.

Across the area there is a very high percentage of Council or Housing Association rented houses. In Bellsbank almost 80% of the houses are for social rent, compared to around 34% in the rest of East Ayrshire.

Dalmellington lies just off the A713 main tourist route to Castle Douglas. There is very little signage from the main road to indicate services available in the town, so it is frequently bypassed by tourists. Within the town, traffic management is a problem, with narrow roads and pavements, and poorly signed parking.

The area is surrounded by forested landscapes which include several Sites of Special Scientific Interest, the most notable being Loch Doon. The area is on the edge of the New Galloway Forest Park and Dark Skies area and is strategically placed at the boundary of the Buffer and Transition Zones of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere. Craiggengillan Estate consists of 3000 acres encompassing a designed landscape, woodland pasture and

water providing a diverse habitat. There are many locally known walks around the area, and an annual walking weekend is organised in August.

Dalmellington as a settlement owes its origins to the natural landscape of the Doon Valley. The village grew up around the Motte located on the southern bank of the Muck Water on the higher ground to the east of the historic settlement and the natural river crossing at its foot. After centuries of industrialisation which has provided a boom and bust economy for the people of the small town, it is time for Dalmellington to embrace its origins and celebrate its greatest assets – the surrounding natural environment and its heritage. The designation of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere affords and its position within it, affords Dalmellington the opportunity to maximise its position as a gateway to the area providing services which support and compliment the Biosphere ethos.

The town has a remote location within East Ayrshire, far from the civic capital Kilmarnock, however only 18km from Ayr on the coast, Dalmellington is on the key route from Ayrshire to Galloway the Galloway Forest Park and its outstanding natural beauty. The mining activities around Dalmellington and the inhabitant's progressive historical dependence on this for their economic survival has created the pervading perception that Dalmellington is an industrial community in decline with nothing to offer tourists or visitors from out with the town. The town, via the various active community groups is currently working hard to shake off lingering negative opinions and Dalmellington's unique location, at the border of Ayrshire and Galloway, surrounded by the natural environment of the Galloway Hills, Loch Doon and the Doon Valley, and it's fascinating heritage puts it in a prime position to take advantage of the blossoming tourist industry in the region.

Dalmellington is in the process of re-inventing itself as a destination for a DAY TRIP, a REST STOP and ultimately a BASE for visitors to the area of whom there are many, by tackling the town's provision and quality of amenities and attractions and addressing improvements to the physical environment. The Dalmellington Parish Community Action Plan, produced by the Dalmellington Community Futures Steering Group, itself identifies Tourism and Heritage as ***“our main hope for regeneration”*** recognising that

***“to reach our potential and make the most of the exciting developments, we will need to improve and promote what is here already”.***

As a starting point they have identified: -

**TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS;**

**ENVIRONMENT AND ACCESS;** and

**COMMUNITY PRIDE, FACILITIES AND EVENTS** as the areas to prioritise.

***“Despite the effects of opencast mining and the very present threat of wind turbine development, our natural environment is our “golden egg” and we will protect it, cherish it and share it.”***

The CAP identifies Dalmellington's unique and positive qualities: -

**...WELCOMING TO VISITORS WHILE PROVIDING QUALITY SERVICES, JOBS AND ACTIVITIES FOR LOCAL PEOPLE**

**...CARING FOR AND PROMOTING THE SPECTACULAR NATURE AND WEALTH OF HERITAGE THAT WE HAVE AROUND US**

**...WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT ALL OUR GENERATIONS AND CITIZENS**

The town and its inhabitants importantly provide a number of unexploited strengths which could be capitalised upon to compliment and support the growth of tourism: -

- The biggest employers in the town are Care Homes and their existence obviously provides an increased population of elderly inhabitants who themselves attract visitors and provide a “captive market” keen to celebrate heritage and on the lookout for afternoon tea destinations;
- The Silver Band are renowned for their talent the world over;
- The Secondary School has strong reputation for music and the arts;
- The surrounding area is once again predominantly agricultural engaged in food and wool production;
- There are many successful youth groups and projects providing strong community based opportunities for social enterprise;
- The town has a rich and varied heritage and culture including the Motte, the Old Kirkyard, links to Burns and Hettrick and its own under-exploited Doon Valley Museum.

As well as developing its own events and attractions, Dalmellington as a gateway to the Galloway Forest from Ayrshire and the north, is ideally placed to take full advantage of the growing number of visitors to the area, already enticed to the locality to explore and experience the following: -

## **2.0 ENVIRONMENTAL/ECO TOURISM**

### **GALLOWAY FOREST PARK**

Known affectionately as the “highlands of the lowlands”, established in 1947 and managed by the Forestry Commission Scotland, Britain’s largest forest park includes mountains and unspoilt ancient woodlands attracting some 800,000 visitors every year.

### **DARK SKY PARK**

Due to its remoteness, the Galloway forest Park has been awarded the status of being one of only four “Dark Sky Parks” in the western world. This means that the largest forest park in Scotland has become the only Dark Sky Park in the UK

### **SCOTTISH DARK SKY OBSERVATORY**

The Scottish Dark Sky Observatory occupies a fantastic hilltop site on the edge of the Galloway Dark Sky Park. This publicly accessible educational observatory exists under some of the darkest skies in the UK and has two large telescopes through which to observe the night sky and a mobile inflatable planetarium. Run by a resident astronomer and science educator as well as a group of local volunteers the Observatory is located at the southern edge of the Craigengillan Estate off the A713 near Dalmellington at the end of a remote and rough forestry road. Huge potential exists to link service provision within the town with the facility including ideas for food and transport.

### **CRAIGENGILLAN ESTATE**

Craigengillan was first established as an estate in 1611, as the seat of the McAdam family. Held by the family for almost 400 years, Craigengillan is a rare example of a complete and unfragmented estate. It includes a Category A listed mansion house and stable court, as well as formal policies and a celebrated Pulham rock and water garden. In 1757 John McAdam, the great engineer and innovator, inherited the estate. He and his cousin, John Loudon McAdam, invented tarmac and became road and bridge builders. John McAdam was a popular figure in the local community, providing employment and doing much good. A sponsor of the arts, he subscribed to the works of Robert Burns and invited him to stay at Craigengillan in 1786. Burns wrote a poem to McAdam thanking him for his support.

***’Twas noble, Sir; ’twas like yourself,  
To grant your high protection:  
A great man’s smile ye ken fu’well,  
Is ay a blest infection.***

Today Craigengillan welcomes visitors from all walks of life. When the estate changed hands in November 1999, the new owner Mark Gibson, immediately took down the “Keep Out” signs and embarked on a policy of encouraging public access. His ambitious aim is to make Craigengillan a living model of environmental excellence within the UNESCO Biosphere and Dark Sky Park and while doing this to act as a catalyst for the economic and environmental regeneration of the Doon Valley and beyond. Over the years Craigengillan has played host to

many notable visitors but nowadays over 45,000 visitors enjoy the unique beauty of this very special place each year – appreciating its setting, wildlife, history and the restoration and conservation work the new owner has undertaken; staying on the estate at Fort Carrick or in the holiday cottages; attending weddings and events; visiting the observatory; and participating in country pursuits such as walking, horse-riding, fishing, kayaking and curling – all of which are available on the estate.

The estate would like to develop further with an outdoor activities centre and forest chalets, both of which would be joint venture partnerships. In 2013, Craigengillan Estate drafted proposals for a Ranger Service which would provide laboratory space, guided walks and interpretative materials based around the natural environment of the Estate and Loch Doon. The Estate considers that the Centre should be housed in the Town Centre and form a start-off point for Land Rover trips to the Observatory and other natural attractions.

The development of such a facility within the town would provide an important, and currently lacking connection between the town and the Estate and the development of vacant and derelict property to provide such a facility would perfectly meet the sustainable ethos of the Biosphere Operational Strategies and goals of Conservation, Learning and Research and Sustainable Development.

#### **GALLOWAY AND SOUTHERN AYRSHIRE BIOSPHERE – SCOTLANDS FIRST**

Covering an area of 5,268 square kilometres the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere (GSAB) is a status given in recognition of its special natural qualities. A reserve, simply known as a Biosphere, is a special designation awarded by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural organisation (UNESCO) to areas renowned for their special environments which are valued by local people. GSAB is a first for Scotland to demonstrate our passion for living in a way that benefits people and nature. Any initiative which demonstrates good practice in conservation or environmentally sustainable development will be promoted as long as it meets the GSAB criteria.

GSAB is home to 95,000 people who want to make life better while caring for the natural environment. It is a place where continued cooperation and collaboration will show that a sustainable way of living is not only possible but already happening. The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere boundary embraces diverse countryside surrounding the Galloway Hills. The rivers radiating out from the hills provide water as a common theme connecting the cultural identity and natural environment with everyone living and working in the area. The Biosphere Partnership is a charity made up of representatives from communities, businesses, organisations and agencies. The Partnership is working towards ambitious goals by encouraging people to share an enthusiasm for their special place and sign the Biosphere Charter.

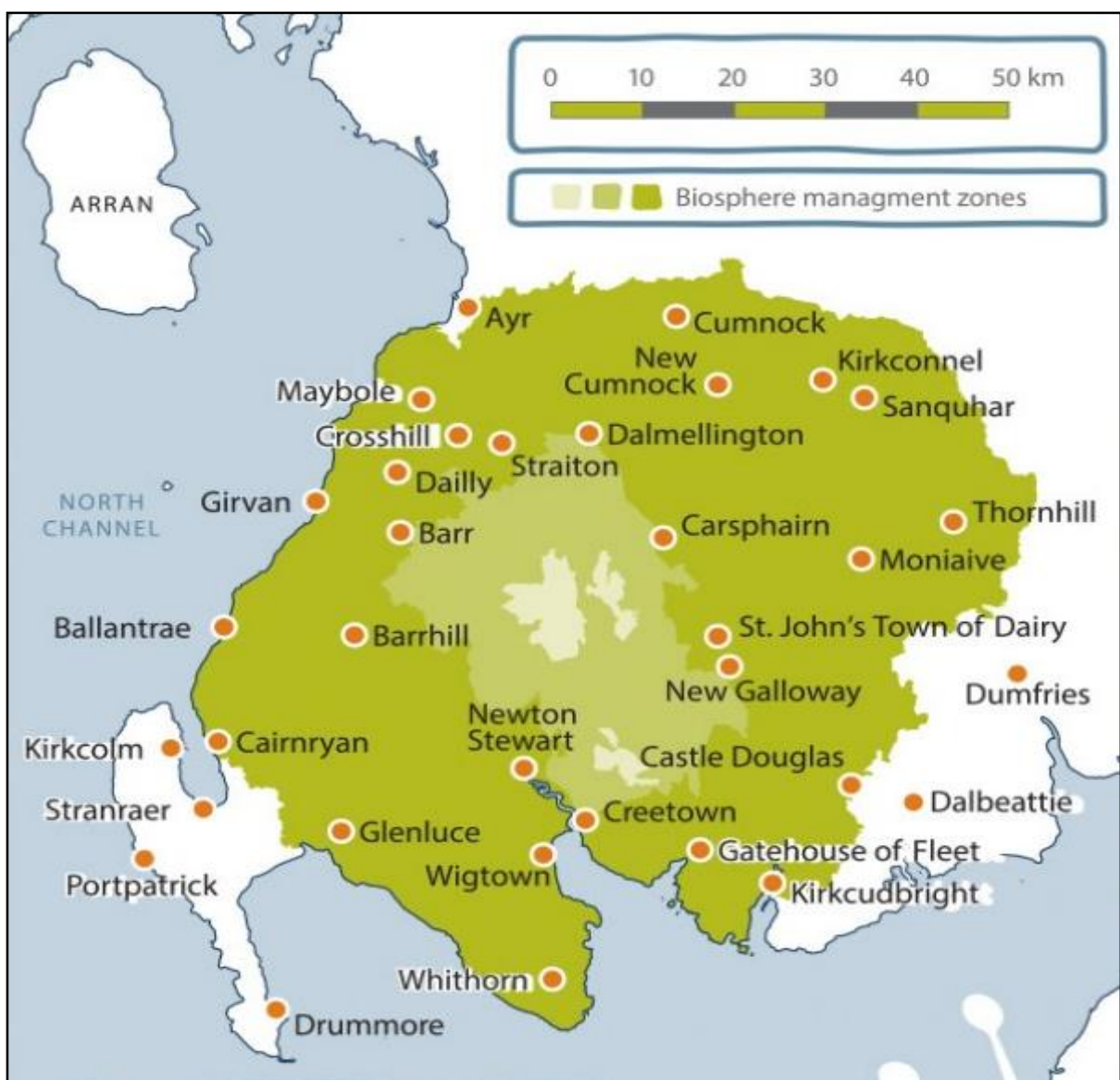
The Biosphere has three goals: -

- **Conservation:** promoting the preservation of wildlife, habitats and landscape;



- **Learning:** supporting a better understanding of nature and global issues;
- **Development:** fostering a sustainable economy and society.

Dalmellington sits on the northern-most edge of the Buffer Management Zone, an ideal position to act as the gateway from East Ayrshire through the Transition Zone and into the heart of the Biosphere. The Transition Area is where people live and where sustainable economic and community development is being actively promoted. As one of the areas small towns it is just as important to the Biospheres existence and well-being as the National reserves of Cairnmore and Silver Flowe and the Merrick Kells Site of Specific Scientific Interest which are its Core Areas and if the vision is to be achieved, communities such as Dalmellington have the opportunity to take a lead in developing more sustainable ways of living that will benefit the environment, economy and community of the area.



*The Galloway and South Ayrshire Biosphere boundary.*

## **LOCH DOON – Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**

Situated just three miles east of the town of Dalmellington, part of the **Galloway Forest Park** yet easily accessible from Ayrshire and Glasgow, Loch Doon is fast becoming a tourist hotspot with the **Scottish Dark Sky Observatory** opening in 2012, a new café by the dam that is open 7 days a week, a new Touring Caravan Park and free camper van and camping spots patrolled by a ranger. From the car park signposted from the A713 it is about 2 miles to **Loch Doon Dam** and seven miles to **Loch Doon Castle**. The area has a popular riverside walk and four hill ranges including **Corbetts**. Loch Doon is the largest inland loch in southern Scotland at about 7 miles long. The dam was built in 1935 for generating hydro-electricity and is currently owned and used by Scottish Power. The water for the Hydro System leaves the loch from the east side, through a large pipeline. That water then flows to other lochs with Hydro Power Stations between Carsphairn and Dumfries. The **Roundhouse Cafe** is situated close to Loch Doon Dam and the popular **Ness Glen** riverside walking trail starts here. The path down Ness Glen is one of the most impressive and scenic in Scotland. A nest is situated across the loch from the cafe for a pair of **osprey** that have been frequenting Loch Doon for several years, they had their first chicks here in 2014. The first of the birds arrived back at Loch Doon on the 8th April 2015. You can use a large scope at the cafe to watch the birds, or to view the Rhinns of Kells mountain range down the southeast side of the loch. There have been an estimated 5,000 visitors to the café just to see the ospreys this year. The shingle beach at the Roundhouse Cafe is ideal for launching **small boats or canoes**. You have to bring your own vessel just now, but it is expected there will be boats or canoes for hire here soon. There are a number of bank **fishing** spots all along the loch. Brown Trout are the main fish in the loch. Bait can be obtained from the Roundhouse Cafe. Loch Doon Castle is almost at the far end of the loch. The castle was originally built on an island in the loch and had connections to King Robert the Bruce. It was moved to its current spot next to the loch before they built the dam to raise the water level. At the south side of Loch Doon, just before the cottage, is an entrance to the Galloway Forest Park and **Carrick Forest Drive**. There is also a large sign giving information on the type of **wildlife** you should look out for in the park. There is a pay machine that costs about £2 for a ticket that allows a car a day in the park. The road is loose ground but in fairly good condition since being re-levelled in 2013, great for **walking or mountain biking**. Many **motorbikes** also use this route. Three miles along the forest road you reach Loch Riecawr that also has a dam, **kids play area** and seating. This is a scenic loch with good hill walking down the west side. The highest hill here is Shalloch-on-Minnoch at 2,520 feet and the 2,766 foot Merrick is on the same range to the south. There is a road from this car park down the side of the loch to the bottom of these hills, marked as the Tunskeen Bothy, a popular spot from where to hike the steep east sides of the three 2,500 plus hills on this range. You can also travel along this road past another two lochs, then into the scenic village of Straiton, that is about 14 miles southeast of Ayr. Another few miles into the park you reach Loch Braden, also with a dam. From the dam, you can see the mountains on the Isle of Arran. There are two roads out of the park from here. You can follow signs from this dam to the **Stinchar Bridge and Falls**. These are small scenic falls with seating areas and a popular trail that follows the river downhill. There is also a well- marked, man- made path from the falls through woodland and over the 1,532 ft

**Cornish Hill** to Cornish Loch. Straiton village is situated 7 miles north of Cornish Loch with an Inn for meals and more popular walks.

Dalmellington as the closest settlement to Loch Doon has massive opportunity to provide associated services and create an active tourist programme for promoting Loch Doon and its environs.

### **3.0 HERITAGE TOURISM**

#### **DALMELLINGTON MOTTE**

Probably one of the least celebrated historic sites in Ayrshire the Norman mote, or castle mound in the historic town of Dalmellington deserves a bit more recognition. Not much is known about the castle history. It seems likely that the site was used as early as Neolithic times – indeed... The mote we see today was probably built about 1200, under the lordship of Thomas Colville le Scott, and it would have served as a seat of local government; a place to administer justice and impose authority over Scott's domains.

The mote describes an almost perfect cone, some 60 feet around at the base and rising up to a broad trench, or terrace and then to a wide, flat top about 60 feet above ground level. The terrace is broadest to the north, and joins a sloping rampart to the west. A timber palisade would originally have stood atop the summit, protecting a wooden tower.

At the base of the mote was a large open area, or bailey, where secondary buildings for animals, storage, and the lord's retainers would have stood, enclosed within a similar outer fence. You can still see traces of the outlying bailey ditch, but all traces of building work are long gone. The motte is extremely well preserved and that is the most interesting feature of the site.

***"I am nuts about history, but I had no idea the Dalmellington Motte existed."***

***"I do wish the motte was more highly publicized because it's actually quite impressive!"***

Dalmellington has the opportunity to develop the Motte as a tourist attraction in its own right. The Scheduled Ancient Monument affords the community to the chance to cultivate the site in any way they see fit from basic improvements to its current accessibility, to full blown aspirations for a reconstruction and visitor centre.

#### **DALMELLINGTON OLD KIRKYARD**

Once the site of the original medieval parish church, the earliest surviving session records date from the post-Reformation period in 1641, so, again, almost nothing is known about the old church, including when it was founded and what it looked like. The pattern of parishes in Scotland was established in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, so it would be reasonable to assume that the first church in Dalmellington would date from that period. It is not clear whether the Motte or the church would have been built first. It was, however, located on one of the few cross-country routes for pilgrims to Whithorn so there may be some documentary evidence elsewhere detailing its existence and form. A new Parish Church was opened in 1766 on Church Hill and the old church was demolished sometime during the 1830s. The site was re-utilised in the 1860s for the Greek Revival mausoleum of the McAdams of Craigen Gillan. The old churchyard also contains a number of fine post-

reformation grave markers and a Covenanters memorial which along with the mausoleum require conservation and protection.

Dalmellington has the opportunity to identify and include the Old Kirkyard as heritage asset in its own right and as a wildlife haven for use by the community and visitors alike, again, an approach entirely consistent with Biosphere criteria.

### **DALMELLINGTON TOWN TRAIL**

Given the existence of the Motte and the Old Kirkyard, and the strong documentary history of the town and its surrounding environs there exists a wealth of material to create a fascinating town trail for locals and visitors alike, for education and leisure purposes, perhaps linked to a local groups plans to develop the under-developed Doon Valley Museum as a community run heritage centre. Vikings, the Romans, Dame Helens Castle, Loch Doon Castle, the pilgrim route to Whithorn, the Covenanters and the weaving industry all shaped Dalmellington long before coal-mining. The rich and fascinating local heritage should be used to promote the town itself as a tourist attraction and to create an alternative image to the perceived one of a depressed post-industrial community depleted of any current value. Dalmellington has a long and varied history that should be offered, illustrated, developed and promoted at every opportunity.

### **WAR HERITAGE**

#### **WW1 - LOCH DOON AERIAL GUNNERY SCHOOL**

Loch Doon Aerial Gunnery School, located to the west of Dalmellington, was an ill-conceived project that wasted over £3 million in trying to establish a school, with rail mounted targets zig-zagging down steep hillsides to simulate enemy aircraft in flight. The hugely ambitious project included the construction of an airfield, a dam, a hydro-electric scheme, a light railway, and several camp sites to accommodate 1500 civilian contractors from Messrs McAlpine, 1200 German POWs and some 500 troops, together with sewage and water systems and also included a cinema to seat an audience of 400. The work commenced in September 1916 and was abandoned in January 1918. During the project Camlarg House in nearby Dalmellington was requisitioned to serve as the Royal Flying Corps Headquarters.

Trace evidence of the gunnery school can still be found in the area, with some sections of the zigzag ranges and trenches still extant, and visible on the ground. The remains of the accommodation camp also survive in the area but much of the site was lost when the Loch was raised some 10 metres in 1936 for the hydro scheme. Recent aerial images taken when the water was extremely low revealed much of the site as it was and offers a unique perspective of the remains of an extensive complex site for civilians, military personnel and prisoners of war.

#### **WWII**

The outbreak of WWII in 1939 saw Dalmellington again become closely involved with the war effort. During World War II, the area was once more used for training, with troops training being carried out in the surrounding high hills, and amphibious exercises on Bogton Loch. In 1940 the government requisitioned all the halls in the village including the scout hall, band hall and the old picture house. The Eglinton Hall was used as a kitchen and dining hall for the army while the soldiers slept in the various halls and the NCOs etc stayed in relative luxury at Bellsbank House and Camlarg House.

With the recent Centenary of the outbreak of WW1 significant grants are available for projects which afford us the chance to understand the war better, uncover its stories and explore what it means to us today. Dalmellington has a unique war history with physical heritage still extant which the Community could chose to develop and promote to a cross-generational audience and enthusiasts. The large population of older people provides a rich resource in this respect.

## COAL

Coal was central to the war effort. It not only kept people warm but powered industry, railways and shipping. After the loss of French and Belgian coalfields to the Allied war effort British coal was all the more important. This meant that the war saw some of the prosperity return to coalfields after the long hard inter-war years. Contrary, therefore, to what you may imagine the Second World War brought prosperity and economic benefit to Dalmellington rather than austerity, and those years are looked back upon with fondness and a sense of pride. Dalmellington prospered during this period with the local economy supported by mining and the military influx. The continued demand for coal led to the construction of a new village at Burnton and Broomknowe and Bellsbank Crescent were laid out during the 1930s. Dalmellington's increased prosperity was evidenced by the development of its own cinema and the Merrick Café and Dance Hall.

Perhaps the most significant change the urban character of Dalmellington has seen, was a direct consequence of the hydro scheme works at Loch Doon during the inter-war years. Heavy construction traffic resulted in the decision being made in 1935 to remove both of the bridges in the heart of the town and to cover the Muck Water over completely thus creating "The Square", and hence altering the character of the village in a manner akin to the traffic-loving town planning of the 60s.

Coal and mining have had an enormous impact on Dalmellington's fortunes over the centuries playing a significant part in the evolution of the town. Heritage and tourism in relation to it are being developed nearby at the Barnony A- Frame project in Auchinleck and there are future plans to develop a Geopark at Spireslack, Muirkirk. This is an aspect the community could chose to develop further along with other heritage projects such as the proposed Heritage Centre or the Scottish Industrial Railway Centre (SIRC).

## **SCOTTISH INDUSTRIAL RAILWAY CENTRE (SIRC) @ WATERSIDE**

The Scottish Industrial Railway centre is a "living museum" where unique and historically significant steam and diesel locomotives are restored and can be seen working in an

authentic setting. The centre is run and operated by volunteers from the Ayrshire Railway Preservation Group. SIRC opens its doors to the public on special Steam Days every summer. You can enjoy a Brake Van ride on a short section of the Dalmellington Iron Company's main line, view locomotives, visit the model railway and check out photographic archives. The locomotive collection is largely based upon engines which worked at Dunaskin. They all have strong Scottish connections and many were built by Andrew Barclay and Sons at Kilmarnock. The collection of wagons represent the diversity of Ayrshire industries such as distilling, explosives, and coal mining. There is a shop and a café both open on Steam Days and free parking.

Coal and ironstone mining was started in the Doon Valley by the Dalmellington Iron Company in 1848. The company based its operations at Dunaskin, and operated eight furnaces which worked day and night, producing pig iron and providing employment for up to 1,400 people until iron production ceased in 1921. A brickwork, the remains of which can still be seen, replaced the furnaces and delivered building bricks until 1976. Production of coal continued at various collieries until 1978. When the collieries finally closed, the steam worked railway linking them with the British Rail line from Ayr at Dunaskin was also closed. Given its importance, the site was operated by the Dalmellington and District Conservation Trust until it ceased trading in 2005. Since then, the ARPG have operated most of the site, restoring, maintaining and exhibiting a number of standard gauge steam and diesel locomotives, rolling stock, narrow gauge items and a large collection of photographs and memorabilia. The ARPG recently purchased the Loco Shed, Wagon Repair Shops, Station and some land. East Ayrshire Council and Cumnock & Doon Valley Minerals Trust made substantial contributions for which the Group is most grateful.

## **DOON VALLEY CRAFTERS**

Doon Valley Crafters, based in Dalmellington are a Social Enterprise set up as a Community Interest Company looking to help you explore Scotland's creative heritage with traditional crafts and skills of yesteryear. Visit their workshop where you can participate in weaving, spinning or even have a go on their pottery wheel. You can see their traditional loom in action and see their brand new Doon Valley Tartan. You can browse and buy locally handmade arts and crafts in their wee shop along with new tartan and accessories and Wolf Fur products unique to DVC.

***“Our aim is to reintroduce the area's cultural heritage to the local community and beyond by utilizing skills that would have been passed down through generations and bringing them into the modern era using modern techniques and materials. We want people to enjoy the benefits of participating in Arts and Crafts.”***

## 4.0 ACTIVE TOURISM

### AYRSHIRE ALPS – SCOTLAND’S FIRST ROAD CYCLING PARK

The hill roads of South Carrick make up the ultimate road cyclist’s playground. Popularly referred to as “the Ayrshire Alps”, the terrain offers fantastic scenery, cycle friendly roads, and a tough cycling challenge. “The Alps” are situated in South Ayrshire, nestled at the north end of the Galloway Forest Park and the area plays host to several major cycling events each year including the Graeme Obree Sportive, the David Bell Memorial and the Tour Doonhame. Many of Britain’s top professional cyclists including Mark Cavendish and Chris Boardman cut their teeth here, competing in the former Girvan 3 Day Stage Race. The Ayrshire Alps is a concept with the aim of enriching the cycling experience in the South Carrick area through partnership working with community, tourism, local authority and enterprise. The aim is to create Scotland’s first Road Cycling Park, similar in ambition to the off-road trail centres found across Southern Scotland.

### SUSTRANS – Land’s End to John o’Groats (LEJOG)

So far there is no official Sustrans route on the National Cycle Network from Land’s End to John o’Groats (also called LEJOG, JOGLE or End to End), however, there are many different options that can be taken to complete the route using the National Cycle Network. At approximately 1,200 miles for the most direct route, these options are roughly 200 miles longer than using A- and B- roads but will be more varied and arguably more enjoyable.

**National Route 7** links Sunderland to Inverness. It forms two-thirds of the famous **Sea to Sea** (C2C) cycle route before heading north to Glasgow via Glen Trool Forest and the Ayrshire coast, before passing through two National Parks – Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and Cairngorms. Carlisle to Glasgow via the Ayrshire Coast is known as the **Lochs & Glens** (South) cycle route. The route passes through Gretna, Dumfries, Castle Douglas and Newton Stewart before crossing Glen Trool Forest. On reaching Ayr, National Route 7 loosely follows the coast through Troon and Irvine and then heads inland to Glasgow on disused railway paths. Newton Stewart via Glasgow to Inverness also forms part of **EuroVelo1**.

Dalmellington has the opportunity develop its own cycle network with potential linkages to national routes and the plans for trail-biking being developed by the North Kyle Forest Masterplan.

### NORTH KYLE FOREST MASTERPLAN

The Forestry Commission Scotland is developing a masterplan for the North Kyle Forest. This will establish how the Forest can contribute to the economic, environmental and social regeneration of the community, taking on board local ideas, experiences and aspirations for the Forest and the surrounding area.



## **5.0 TOURISM FACILITIES & SERVICES**

Dalmellington's natural surroundings provide an abundance of outdoor pursuits accessible to locals and visitors alike. Visitors travelling to the area to participate in the activities available require places to stay and places to eat. Dalmellington currently offers one Bed & Breakfast, the Eglinton Hotel, and one Boutique Hotel, Dalmellington House, ran by the Princes Trust for Carers. There are two high quality self-catering cottages on Craigengillan Estate, which are annually over-subscribed, but none in and around the village. There are no economy or bothy type hostelries available for walkers or cyclists or families or groups. Local social enterprises such as the Dalmellington Crafters and the Scottish Industrial Railway Centre both require accommodation provision in order to expand and attract more visitors. Accommodation in nearby villages are experiencing an increase in business due to the Dark Skies Observatory. The Community Action Plan clearly identified the lack of café/restaurant food provision and wc facilities within the town as clear obstacles to attracting visitors. Visitors who do make the trip off the main road into the town are often disappointed to discover no, or poor quality, facilities and services on offer. There are currently a number of public houses, only one of which, the Eglinton Hotel, offers food, some take-away food outlets which appear to only open in the evening, and two small cafes, one which closes after lunch.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

A **Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS)** is an essential catalyst required by Dalmellington, a town that has and continues to suffer from severe economic deprivation. The community is engaged and supportive of the proposal and are in the early stages of forming a **Community Development Trust (CDT)** to work with the CARS in taking forward some of the opportunities and initiatives the appraisals and feasibility studies have identified.

Dalmellington is brimming with physical and human potential to become a much improved, attractive and bustling tourist town, but it has really suffered to the point where it requires an economic and ideological boost. A CARS is the type of intervention which can make a real and significant impact on the current physical and economic status of the town while inspiring the community to empower themselves further. This Scheme will provide the ideal vehicle for conservation led regeneration to illustrate its benefits to a community which is more than ready to engage and to help reverse the further decline of a much-loved historic townscape. Together, the portfolio of Priority Projects developed in the Feasibility Study have the potential to regenerate and transform the Conservation Area which is hungry for investment. The proposals aim to halt and reverse the decline of Dalmellington's historic townscape by creating an attractive, vibrant and interesting place where people will want to live, work, visit and invest. This will be achieved by funding physical repairs and enhancements which will encourage business confidence; by providing local people with the opportunity to learn new skills; and by inspiring the local community to take pride and interest in and get involved with their own town's heritage.

The Scheme will support the economic and social enhancement of the Conservation Area in line with wider regeneration strategies for the area as discussed in the Executive Summary. With this significant investment Dalmellington's heritage will be better managed and in better condition; local people will have developed skills and learnt about heritage; the community as a whole will have reduced negative environmental impacts, more people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage, Dalmellington will be a better place to live, work and visit and the local economy will be boosted.