

## **Introduction**

- 1.01 The timing of this feasibility study could hardly be better. Issues such as access to the countryside, healthy living, sustainable transport, education, conservation, tourism, social inclusion, rural deprivation and partnerships are currently well up the list on both central and local government agenda. A path around Castle Semple Loch, with attendant linkages supporting facilities and services, including that from Lochwinnoch to the railway station, has a most direct relevance to all of these issues.
- 1.02 The consultants believe that the successful completion of a path around the loch will generate and deliver benefits to the local and wider community of Renfrewshire (and nearby parts of Ayrshire) out of all proportion to the actual cost. We identify the need for an organisation and person, to take hold of the project and run with it whilst emphasising the importance of the involvement of Lochwinnoch community in all phases of the process.
- 1.03 The study begins by looking at the existing situation in terms of both the current policy framework, and the route of the path itself. Extensive consultations were undertaken whilst the survey of the route was in progress. Constraints and the many opportunities are identified in some detail, followed by proposals for the basic route around the loch, including recommendations for linkages, interpretation, conservation, education etc. Engineering issues are discussed and the route of the path divided into five sections selected primarily for their similarity in construction terms. Each section has been costed, and priorities and phasing discussed. Where the money might come from, the possible environmental impacts, and user benefits lead into the conclusions and some thoughts on the actions to be taken, following discussion of the report. Effort has been made to include in the report sufficient detail for it to be used as a base document for a wide variety of grant assistance applications.

## **2.0 The Brief**

- 2.01 The aim of the project was simply stated as being to .... “establish a network of non-motorised access routes linking existing routes, facilities and attractions around Castle Semple Loch, including upgrading the link from the railway station to Lochwinnoch Village”.
- 2.02 The brief included a number of project outcomes and identified a wide range of tasks to be undertaken. All have been addressed and all the recommended consultations undertaken.
- 2.03 Throughout the study, we met and reported to the Core Group at three-weekly intervals. We worked closely with members of the Group and the study is much better for their inputs and the information supplied to us.

### **3.0 Background and Context**

- 3.01 The SRANI study has taken place within an existing framework of Structure and Local Plans as well as non-statutory plans, for example, the CMRP strategy for 2003-6, and the Renfrewshire LEC Area Tourism Strategy. During the course of the study the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill became an Act, and although not yet law, the provisions of the Act are likely to be significant for the implementation of proposals contained in this study.
- 3.02 It is useful, therefore, to provide a brief summary of the main aims and policies of these plans and strategies relevant to the study to allow a later assessment of the degree to which the proposals meet and take them forwards.

### **3.1 Renfrewshire Local Plan – Finalised Version**

- 3.1.1 Local Plans build on the strategic policies of structure plans and provide detailed policies and proposals for the local area. Four particular strategic aims of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Structure Plan are embodied in the Renfrewshire Local Plan. They are:
- increasing economic competitiveness which includes improving the attractiveness of the area for investment
  - promotion of greater social inclusion and integration which includes improved community facilities and recreational opportunities.
  - the sustaining and enhancement of the natural and built environment.
  - the integration of land use and transportation which includes improved access to and between work, leisure and education, particularly by public transport.
- 3.1.2 The Local Plan also fits closely with the Local Transport Strategy which sets out the Councils policies and proposals for the delivery of a sustainable and integrated transport system. The Local Plan aims to facilitate sustainable forms of transport thereby reducing the need to rely on private cars and encouraging an increase in the use of public transport, and in walking and cycling. This, in time, will lead to a healthier environment by reducing vehicular emissions and encouraging exercise.
- 3.1.3 The Renfrewshire Transport Strategy includes a number of proposals and actions relevant to the current study. They include:-
- a walking policy which...“will improve and extend walking routes...in order to create a walking network...which links all communities in Renfrewshire and also significant settlements in adjacent authorities”.
  - a cycling strategy which aims to achieve the targets for increased cycle use as set out in National Cycling Strategy i.e. doubling current use by 2012, and the creation of a safe and secure cycling/walking network linking village communities with destinations including stations.

- a public transport strategy in association with SPT aimed at making public transport at least as attractive and convenient as the private car, ensuring adequate access by public transport for socially excluded groups and communities and ensuring rural communities have adequate access by public transport.
- 3.1.4 The Local Plan specifically encourages the provision of parking areas to aid Park and Ride schemes, the improvement of facilities for walking and cycling and a transport infrastructure that is accessible and functional for the disabled in terms of location, design and layout. The Council has prepared a Renfrewshire Access Strategy, which considers walking, cycling and riding as well as access to the countryside for recreation. A Cycling Strategy has also been prepared, and is summarised in paragraph 4.13. There is a commitment to protecting the existing Sustrans National Cycle Route Network one of which, Markered Route 7 NCH passes through the study area.
- 3.1.5 The Structure Plan recognises that tourism is an important growth sector and related to 4 main areas of interest, namely; industrial heritage, beautiful scenery, arts and cultural attractions, and sports and leisure facilities. A number of Tourist Development Areas are identified within Renfrewshire where tourist related development will be supported, and Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park is one of them. The plan also recognises that walking and cycling routes, components of the Green Network, also have an important contribution to make to tourism.
- 3.1.6 In terms of the Natural and Built Heritage, the Local Plan confirms that Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park is a major recreational and tourist related resource. 3 objectives are identified all of which are relevant to the study, namely:-
- 1) Identify, protect and where appropriate, enhance areas of importance for their species and nature conservation value.
  - 2) Protect existing trees and woodlands that have an amenity or nature conservation value, promote their positive management and encourage the planting of native and particularly broad-leaved trees.
  - 3) Promote access to the countryside for cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians and where possible, facilitate opportunities for recreation and environmental improvement.
- 3.1.7 The latter objective is particularly noteworthy as it supports the concept of a Green Network which aims to “create high quality environmental corridors and reserves, open spaces, and recreational assets that will assist in social and economic regeneration....., Existing Country Parks.... existing and potential long distance routes, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park..... are identified as priorities for promotion and management within the Green Network”. In terms of access to the countryside, the Plan recognises the new Land Reform Act’s requirement for the preparation of a Core Path Network, and the contribution this can have towards a more sustainable approach to transportation. It is also noted that the Council supports the habitat creation and the flood intervention feasibility study know as the “Three Lochs Project”.

3.1.8 Renfrewshire has a rich and varied built heritage, and the local Plan provides a policy framework, which facilitates its protection and enhancement. As well as buildings, gardens and designed landscapes are identified as making an important contribution to the wider landscape. Much of the study area was once a designed landscape, and the remnants still make a significant contribution to the environment of the study area.

### **3.2 Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority. Strategy 2003 – 2006**

3.2.1 The approved strategy document was made available to the consultants in the period of the study. It sets out clearly a number of strategic aims and objectives, and lists the management activities required to achieve them.

3.2.2 In 1996 the Park Authority developed and adopted a vision, namely “to provide a well-managed, high quality landscape, offering tourists and day visitors access to a wide range of sustainable recreational opportunities”. In order to achieve the vision, a threefold set of aims were also developed and adopted. These are known as the Charter Aims, and are:-

- 1) To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, heritage and natural history of the area.
- 2) To promote the enjoyment of Clyde Muirshiel by tourists and residents.
- 3) To promote the social and economic well being of the people and communities within the area.

3.2.3 Implementation of the above aims has followed four guiding principles , namely:-

- 1) Quality, both in terms of the Park Authority actions and service provided.
- 2) Sustainability. The Park itself is a finite resource and should only be used in a sustainable manner. The actions and programmes of the Park Authority itself should reflect our understanding of the use of resources in a sustainable manner.
- 3) Access. The Strategy emphasises the need to improve access for all. It recognises that there are different levels of activity required by different user groups, and that provision of a wide range of opportunities for both local communities and the conurbations within its catchment must be made. The Park recognises barriers to access including physical disability, charges, availability of public transport, and those suffered by disadvantaged groups. The Park delivers services aimed at challenging these barriers including social exclusion.
- 4) Partnership.

3.2.4 The strategy goes on to develop 6 Strategic Aims with associated objectives and management actions which will form the basis for developing the annual work and action plans. The 6 aims and objectives are listed as follows:-

## **1) Recreation and Access**

### **Strategic Aim**

To manage the Park's resources to provide for a wide range of sustainable recreational activities for the enjoyment of all and to improve the health and well being of our users whilst minimising the impact on farmers, land managers, other land users and those who live and work in the area.

Objectives:

- 1) To work with Local Authority partners to implement new Access Legislation.
- 2) To deliver recreation and access opportunities.
- 3) To support recreation and access initiatives.

## **2) Biodiversity and Nature Conservation**

### **Strategic Aim**

To conserve and enhance our wildlife and habitats including semi-natural woodlands, wetlands and moors in harmony with a thriving land-based economy while allowing for public enjoyment.

Objectives:

- 1) To contribute, safeguard and enhance biodiversity in the Park.
- 2) To develop priorities for Woodland Management.
- 3) To deliver priorities in Woodland Management.
- 4) To deliver priorities in Wetland, Coastal and Loch Management.

## **3) Education and Understanding**

### **Strategic Aim**

Through our environmental education, interpretation and communication activities raise the awareness, understanding and appreciation of the special qualities of Clyde Muirshiel and the work of the Park Authority in its conservation and enhancement.

Objectives:

- 1) To maintain the Park's commitment to environmental education.
- 2) To develop understanding of the countryside.
- 3) To maintain the infrastructure of the Park that supports education and understanding.
- 4) To raise the profile of the Park.

## **4) Landscape and the Built Heritage**

### **Strategic Aim**

To conserve and enhance the character of this landscape and its manmade features by integrated management and through the provision of services that help visitors understand and enjoy it.

Objectives:

- 1) To conserve and enhance the built heritage of the Park.
- 2) To conserve and enhance the landscape character of the Park.

## **5) Tourism**

## **Strategic Aim**

To provide a wide range of quality, sustainable tourism products, facilities and services to visitors. These will be appropriate to the qualities of the Park and will bring economic benefit to the area.

Objectives:

- 1) To provide Visitor Centres that meet the needs of tourists and visitors.
- 2) To provide a range of services and products that meets the needs of tourists and visitors.
- 3) To generate sustainable numbers of visitors to the Park.
- 4) To manage the impact of visitors to the Park.

## **6) Management**

## **Strategic Aim**

To provide efficient, effective and sustainable utilisation of resources to achieve the 3 Charter Aims and the Strategic Aims of the Park Authority as stated in this Strategy.

Objectives:

- 1) To maximise achievements by implementing appropriate management systems.
- 2) To ensure effective and efficient management of personnel resources.
- 3) To ensure effective and efficient management of financial resources.

### **3.3 Renfrewshire LEC Area. 3 Year Tourism Strategy 2001-2003.**

3.3.1 The Report was prepared by MGA Tourism and Leisure Consultancy, and presented to the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Valley Tourist Board, Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, and Inverclyde and Renfrewshire Councils in July 2001.

3.3.2 The Strategy includes a market review, a summary of stakeholder's views, a SWOT analysis, and an examination of the strategic content followed by proposals for strategic priorities and objectives, and an Action Plan. It contains relevant information, in tourism terms, for the development and marketing of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park and Castle Semple, and stresses the importance of the day visitor market. It identifies that the area's location within 45 minutes of 50% of the Scottish population creates an opportunity for Renfrewshire and by implication, Castle Semple that has yet to be fully realised. The Strategy supports, inter alia, the further development of projects, which feature the natural environment, active pursuits, de-stressing outdoor activities such as cycling and walking, and cultural activities.

3.3.3 The following is a summary of points identified within the Strategy, which are relevant or of interest to the proposed Castle Semple Loch footpath network.

- \* In 1999, some 2.1 million visitors were attracted into the Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire area, generating direct expenditure of £185 million. The bulk of all visitations was by day visitors, but 73% of the expenditure was by visitors staying overnight. However, 50% of total visitor spend is attributed to the Renfrewshire Council area.
- \* Significant strengths and opportunities exist which underpin the tourism strategy and they include:-
  - ease of access by road, rail and air
  - proximity to half the Scottish population
  - its countryside
  - increasing pressure on leisure time will impact positively on locations able to offer easy access.
  - proximity to Glasgow which has a strong and readily recognised image in the marketplace for leisure breaks, business meetings and conventions.
- \* Significant weaknesses include:-
  - a lack of awareness of Renfrewshire in the market place
  - lack of a significant destination product in the area.
- \* Evidence from other tourism strategies suggest the following as potentially important aspects of Renfrewshire's future tourism approach:-
  - it should focus on packaging and developing "experiential" aspects of the area.
  - concentrate attention on native products such as de-stressing outdoor activities (cycling/walking) and cultural activities.
  - it should capitalise on the accessibility of the area.
  - it should develop a strong, easily recognised brand or image for the area.
  - it should take advantage of Glasgow's strong market awareness and position itself in marketing terms as "close to Glasgow".
- \* The Action Plan identifies a series of actions in respect of development and they include:-
  - encourage joint working, promotion and access.
  - provision of business development assistance for activity-related development.
  - develop an area wide events strategy including appropriate marketing and packaging support mechanisms.
  - improve the quality of catering provision.
  - develop an access strategy and focus environmental improvements in key towns and villages, at entry points to the area, and on main tourism corridors.



### **3.4 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003**

- 3.4.1. The Act establishes access rights so that everyone can enjoy the outdoors secure in the knowledge that they have the right to be on most land or water provided those rights are exercised responsibly. Whilst the Act was passed on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2003 – it does not come into force until a new Scottish Outdoor Access Code has been prepared, consulted upon, and presented to and agreed by the Scottish Parliament. The Code is meant to accurately reflect the spirit of the Act, and clearly set out the access rights and responsibilities of users and land managers.
- 3.4.2. In the context of the study, the confirmation of access rights is likely to be important given existing access and land management issues at the eastern end of Castle Semple Loch.
- 3.4.3. The draft Outdoor Access Code sets out in detail the public's access rights; where and when they can be exercised; and it defines "recreational" activities under the terms of the Code. It sets out how rights should be exercised responsibly for access, and sets out a practical guide to access rights and responsibilities. The guide provides detailed and clear guidance to responsible behaviour by both the public and land managers covering 37 different places and activities varying from canals to field margins to deer stalking to wild camping.
- 3.4.4. The Code then states that public bodies and particularly local authorities and SNH have a key role to play in making access rights work well for the public and land managers. They are charged with respecting, safeguarding and promoting access rights through their policies, plans and activities. They can do this, for example, by:-
  - reviewing and amending or developing policies and programmes of assistance (such as grants)
  - working positively to help the exercise of access rights on their land and water.
  - setting a good example by fully meeting their obligations as land managers under the Code,
  - co-ordinating their access policies and initiatives with other public bodies.
  - providing information to the public and land managers about exercising access rights responsibly and managing land and water responsibly for access, and by
  - making full use of their powers,
- 3.4.5 The Code recommends that in the exercising of access rights, the involvement of local communities and new local access forums will help ensure that everyone is comfortable with the new arrangements.



3.4.6 The Act gives Local Authorities a wide range of new duties and powers but there are 4 musts, namely:-

- 1) Uphold access rights by asserting, protecting and keeping open and free from obstruction or encroachment any route or other means by which people exercise their rights.
- 2) Set up at least one local access forum for its area.
- 3) Prepare a plan for its area within 3 years, for a system of paths (known as core paths) sufficient to give people reasonable access throughout the area, and
- 4) Review its byelaws and amend these when necessary.

#### **4.0 The Existing Situation**

##### **4.1 Lochwinnoch Village and Castle Semple Centre**

4.1.1 The beginnings of Lochwinnoch go back to the stone age about 3000BC. Well-preserved Bronze Age artefacts have been found and an Iron Age fort can still be seen on Knockmade Hill. Hollowed out tree trunks used as canoes in the shallow lochs have also been found.

4.1.2 The village of Lochwinnoch grew up around its church and by the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the chapel of Lochwinnoch was under control of monks of nearby Paisley Abbey. A new church was built in 1729. Part of it, now known as “Auld Simon”, still stands in the old churchyard. An old house, built in 1731 and thought to be the manse, can still be seen in Jonshill. The village was primarily agricultural until 1740 when the first linen factory was built. The industrial revolution at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with its mills and factories generated a demand for new housing, and a planned extension or new town was built.

4.1.3 It centred on the current cross and involved the creation of a new High Street and Main Street with Calder Street and Church Street at right angles to them. 2 new churches were built and are still in use today. The streams rushing down from the moors north of the village provided waterpower for early industry. At one time there were 20 thread mills in the parish. Large weaving mills were established in the 1780s, and Calderburgh Mill (now converted into attractive flats) employed 240 by 1791. In 1900, silk weaving began in Lochwinnoch and continued very successfully until 1985.

4.1.4 Furniture making also established in the village in the 1800s, and Lochwinnoch furniture was to be found in the great Clyde built liners such as the Lusitania, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth and the Belfast built Titanic. Today only the cooperage, which makes barrels, remains of this once prosperous industry, and it is in the process of closing. In the moors behind Lochwinnoch, barytes was mined and provided employment for local people until 1969 when cheap overseas supplies led to the closure of the mine.

- 4.1.5 The railway came to Lochwinnoch in 1840, and the village is still fortunate to retain a station on the busy electrified Glasgow to Ayr line. It means that Lochwinnoch is easily accessible by rail from Glasgow, Paisley, Johnstone and Howwood to the east and from Kilwinning, Irvine, Troon, Ayr, Ardrossan and Prestwick Airport to the west. However, the hourly service outside peak hours is not particularly satisfactory.
- 4.1.6 The station is currently unmanned and the passenger shelters on each platform are not weather or waterproof. Access to and egress from the westbound platform is not possible for wheelchairs.
- 4.1.7 Following the installation of CCTV cameras, a small number of commuters leave their cars all day at the car park. A local bus service meets trains but only if they are on time.
- 4.1.8 The footpath from the station to the village along the busy A760 is narrow and does not feel safe for pedestrians. It has recently been lit to link to the lights in Church Street, but overall walking or cycling between the village and the station is not an enjoyable experience, despite beautiful views up and down the Barr and Castle Semple Lochs.
- 4.1.9 Lochwinnoch village has a variety of shops and services available although as in many small towns and villages, these have been reduced in recent years and may contract further without the positive management of residents to shop locally, or an increase in visitors leading to a boost in passing trade. The shops and services include a bank with cash point, a post office, greengrocers, chemist, 2 bakeries, 2 general stores, 2 hairdressers, 3 carry-outs, 2 restaurants (only open 3 nights a week), a tearoom/bistro, newsagent, solicitor, accountant, doctors surgery, dental surgery (part time), an antique/gift shop, a village hall/community centre, library, 3 churches, an outdoor bowling club, golf club, football pitches and changing facilities (the Annexe), a children's play area, a cycle skills track, indoor bowling and gymnasium, 3 pubs, the Castle Semple Watersports Centre, and the RSPB reserve and visitor centre. The village filling station closed during the current study period.
- 4.1.10 The village retains a strong sense of community and a wide number of societies and village activities are supported. The Lochwinnoch Millennium Events Group was the catalyst for the establishment of the Lochwinnoch Sustainable Communities Project, and the employment of a community development worker for a 3-year period from March 2002. Indeed, it is this group which is the "client" for the current study. The Project has, inter alia, established a community gardening group, supported a community group involved in establishing a sustainable garden project, established and supported a local walking group, supported local businesses to halt their decline, developed youth activities, projects and participation, and supported the current study. The village maintains its own website at [www.lochwinnoch.info](http://www.lochwinnoch.info), and the CLAN project is pursuing the provision of satellite broadband access.

- 4.1.11 Lochwinnoch used to have a second railway line built in 1905, which came through the actual village on its way to Kilbirnie. This was closed in the late 1980s and was converted to a cycle track which forms part of the National Route 7, and links Lochwinnoch to neighbouring villages and towns of Kilbarchan, Johnstone, Linwood, Paisley, Bridge of Weir, Kilmacollm, Port Glasgow, Greenock and Glasgow, and westwards and south to Kilbirnie, Kilwinning, Kilmarnock, Irvine, Ayr and Carlisle. It has recently been upgraded to a tar surface with a resulting immediate increase in usage by walkers and cyclists. Lochwinnoch transport links by road, rail and cycle track are, therefore, very good but the study team believe the full benefits to the village and Castle Semple/Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park have yet to be seen by residents and visitors alike.
- 4.1.12 The second railway line almost completely separated the village from Castle Semple Loch and it still does visually, although some of the embankment has gone or been built upon. Castle Semple, Barr and Kilbirnie Lochs are a significant landscape feature on the borders of Ayrshire and Renfrewshire. Castle Semple Loch is an important water sports facility, and a recreational amenity as well as being an SSSI. The Barr Loch is part of the same SSSI, and within recorded history was joined to Castle Semple. Kilbirnie Loch in Ayrshire is an important coarse fishery as well as being used for water skiing and canoeing.
- 4.1.13 Since the late 1600's the Barr and Castle Semple Lochs have been the subject of extensive draining, engineering and landscape improvement works (see Appendix 2). Evidence of those works, and to an extent they still function at the Aird Meadow, is there to see, and their story has enormous potential for interpretation and visitor interest.
- 4.1.14 Loch water levels and flooding remains an issue and is the subject of a recent study and ongoing initiative. Known as the Three Lochs Project, more details are given in paragraph 4.7
- 4.1.15 Castle Semple Loch is used extensively for water based activities including rowing, canoeing, sailing, boating and fishing, for walking along some of its banks, for viewing and looking over, and for bird watching and educational activities. The water sports are based at Castle Semple Centre, administered by the CMPA, and the bird watching at the RSPB centre adjacent to the Aird Meadow. Both facilities are extremely popular, attract large numbers of day visitors, and both organise events and activities throughout the year for adults and children. The proximity of the castle Semple Centre to road, rail and cycle links makes this the gateway to the Regional Park.

## **4.2 Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park**

- 4.2.1 The idea of a Regional Park was first mooted in the Abercromby Clyde Valley Plan in 1947. Renfrew County Council took up the idea some 20 years later, and as a first step acquired and designated as Country Parks, the areas of Muirshiel and Castle Semple in 1970 and 1971 respectively. It was not until 1990, however, that the Park was designated and not until 1996, that the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park Authority was established.
- 4.2.2 The Park now covers 28,100 ha or 106 square miles which includes woodland, moor land, loch side and coastal scenery. It is ideal for walking, cycling, sailing, canoeing, fishing, picnics, local and natural history, or simply relaxing in spectacular surroundings. The Park Authority is charged with functions relating to tourism, recreation and conservation within the Park area.
- 4.2.3 The Park Authority is a joint committee of Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, and Renfrewshire and since June 2000, Scottish National Heritage (SNH). The work of the Park Authority is funded by the above councils, SNH, local enterprise agencies, other grant aiding organisations, fees and charges, and by the shop at Castle Semple.

## **4.3 Facilities, Activities and Attractions**

- 4.3.1 Castle Semple Loch is set within extremely attractive gently rolling countryside. There is a strong field pattern of hedges, hedgerow, trees and clumps of mainly deciduous woodland. The well-wooded appearance of the area is helped by it having been a designed landscape, some of which remains – particularly at Parkhill Woods which are now part of the Park and provide attractive woodland walks and a magnificent viewpoint south and westwards over Castle Semple and Barr Lochs to Kilbirnie Loch.
- 4.3.2 The designed landscape was part of the Castle Semple estate (see Appendix 2) The Macdowall's improvements to their estate has also left us a legacy of buildings and structures of interest, including ice caves, fish ponds, bridges, and the temple at Kenmure Hill which dominates views eastwards from Castle Semple Loch.

There was also an estate network of driveways, roads and tracks which still exist and form the basis of current footpaths and access roads, for example, the path along part of the northern shore of the loch was the route of the western entrance to Castle Semple House (Photo No 1), and similarly, the track from the Howwood Road follows the line of the eastern entrance via the Fancy Bridge to Castle Semple House (Photo No 1).

Likewise, footpaths on the south side of the loch follow routes established at the time of the engineering works to the Barr and Castle Semple Lochs (Photo No 2). One such route now links the Peel Tower, formerly on an island to the loch shores, as well as enclosing the Aird Meadow.

- 4.3.3 The loch is shallow being only 1.9 m deep and has a variety of edge types including marsh, woodland, pasture, stone remnants and some shingle beaches (Photo No 3). There are 3 islands, constructed as part of the landscape improvements, and the whole area adds up to a variety of habitats for plants, animals, and birds to the extent that the whole loch is designated an SSSI (see Appendix 3) (Photo No 4).
- 4.3.4. In 1974, the RSPB opened the Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve. It comprises a Centre building with a well-stocked book and gift shop, a network of footpaths, bird hides and observation points. It attracts over 30,000 visits per annum, and there is a continuous programme of events and activities throughout the year, (see Appendix 4 for a current example). The Centre is staffed by a mix of RSPB staff and volunteers. A significant educational programme for schools and young children is undertaken.
- 4.3.5 The RSPB prepare a variety of quality leaflets and handouts for visitors and the Centre is well signed on the A737, at Lochwinnoch Station, and on the A760 which passes the Centre.
- 4.3.6 Vandalism, damage and disturbance to hides are not a frequent feature on the reserve. When it happens, it is often caused by illegal fishermen who are not members of the angling clubs that fish Castle Semple Loch.
- 4.3.7 Fishing is a popular activity around the whole loch. It is a good coarse fishery and fishing is by permit or club membership only. By and large the anglers, walkers, bird watchers and sportsmen co-exist without significant conflict on the Aird Meadow bund.
- 4.3.8 Castle Semple Centre was opened in 1992. A wide range of activities and facilities are offered from the building and assorted areas. The building itself houses Park staff including countryside rangers, activity instructors and the Development Marketing Officer, a gift shop and tea room, space for meetings, exhibitions and events, including the Ayrshire Farmers Market, and storage of equipment. From the Centre, bicycles can be hired as well as dinghies, rowing boats, canoes, pedalos and aqua trikes. Dinghy sailing, windsurfing and kayaking instruction can be organised via the Centre or one of the clubs based on the loch. Castle Semple has a very successful rowing club, which has produced a number of national and international rowers, and regattas are popular events. Boat storage facilities are also offered and recently acquired floating jetties have greatly enhanced the facilities for water-based activities. Land based courses include archery, map and compass, orienteering, and Duke of Edinburgh training. There is an advertised programme of guided walks and talks. Special needs equipment is also available.
- 4.3.9 The large, free car park is a popular venue for those, who want to sit in their car overlooking the water and watching others feeding the resident duck and swan population, whilst having a picnic and flask of tea. On sunny afternoons and at weekends, the car park is often at or near to capacity throughout the year (Photo Nos 5 & 14).

- 4.3.10 The SUSTRANS National Cycle Route passes immediately to the rear of the Castle Semple Centre, which is a SUSTRANS Stamping Station. The track, recently hard surfaced, is proving to be part of a popular circular walk following the loch side from Castle Semple to Blackditch Bay, and back to the Centre via the cycle track (Photo No 6).
- 4.3.11 SUSTRANS also organise a number of events such as “pedalling picnics” to encourage use of the cycle track and, it is popular for sponsored rides and use by the disabled.

#### **4.4 Listed Buildings**

- 4.4.1 The location of listed buildings is shown on Figure No 4 Master Plan (following page 48). As mentioned previously, the Semple estate improvement works has left a number of listed buildings and structures in Parkhill Woods and others at and on the access road to Low Semple. The story of the estate and the engineering works to the loch provide opportunities for interpretation and points of interest that could be linked to the proposed round the loch footpath. Duncan MacIntosh of Renfrewshire Council has attempted to list, in chronological order, the main events in the development of the estate and a copy is in Appendix 5.
- 4.4.2 The gem of the listed buildings is the Collegiate Church, which was built in about 1504 by the first Lord Semple (Photo No 7). He died with his king at Flodden in 1513, and is buried in an elaborately designed tomb recessed into the wall of the Church. Its importance is reflected by its Historic Scotland custodianship. Despite its proximity and visibility from the cycle track and a Council track passing it, access to the site has been restricted. It is a key attraction in the area and should be easily accessible from both Parkhill Woods and the cycle track.
- 4.4.3 Within the village of Lochwinnoch itself are a number of listed buildings within a conservation area. A conservation area is defined as “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. The special character of this area is the grouping together in the centre of the village of many examples of late 18<sup>th</sup> century domestic architecture. These houses share materials, scale, and many architectural features which, when coupled with their continuous street frontage and street cruciform plan, produces an area of striking homogeneity. (Renfrew District Council, The Lochwinnoch Conservation Area).



## **4.5 Designations**

### **4.5.1 Greenbelt**

Castle Semple Loch and its environs are within the Greenbelt and the boundary is drawn quite tightly around Lochwinnoch as part of the Local Plan's objective of protecting and enhancing the countryside environment. Being in the Greenbelt means that most forms of development will be directed to towns and villages thereby protecting the largely rural environment of Castle Semple Loch. The provision of footpaths and other informal recreational facilities are regarded as uses to be encouraged.

### **4.5.2 Tourist Development Area**

A number of Tourist Development Areas (TDAs) are identified in the local Plan and Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park and cycle routes are 2 of them. The purpose of the designation is to facilitate tourist related development without causing a detrimental impact on the environment or townscapes. A positive designation aiming to encourage appropriate tourism development.

### **4.5.3 Lochwinnoch Conservation Area**

As noted in paragraph 4.4.3, the conservation area status is aimed at preserving and enhancing the character of the area and improving the environment. Designation should be regarded as a positive step given that tourism could have a significant role in maintaining and encouraging local shops and services.

### **4.5.4 Listed Buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments**

Designation should help prevent deterioration in the condition of listed buildings, scheduled monuments and their settings, and help attract grants and assistance where restoration is required. However, scheduling has not saved The Peel Tower from damage by tree roots and the removal of stones by vandals, campers or fishermen (Photo No 8).

### **4.5.5 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCS)**

There are two SINCS in the area of study, namely the woods bordering the Barr Castle drive, and Parkhill Woods. The Council regard these essentially local areas of importance to be a vital component of the nature conservation resource. Through designation, the Council is looking to protect these resources from inappropriate development.

### **4.5.6 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)**

All of Castle Semple Loch is an SSSI. This is a national designation and indicates that the nature conservation interest and value is particularly high. In this case, the interest is for both birds, aquatic and semi-aquatic plant communities.. The SSSI notification (see Appendix 3) lists a number of potentially damaging operations, which, if they were intended, would first require consultation with SNH. SSSI designation does not, in itself, preclude development, but it does require that development proposals are considered carefully by, the proposer, the planning authority, and SNH.



It also means that, unless agreed otherwise by SNH and the planning authority, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required.

Within an SSSI, there are likely to be particularly sensitive areas where the aim would be to discourage access to avoid damage or disturbance. Carefully selected routes and the use of discrete signage and interpretation are often used to manage visitor flows and movement to protect sensitive areas. There will be close examination and evaluation of construction methods, the sourcing and storage of materials to ensure they are inert or not ecologically harmful. There could be strict limits on noise levels and the periods when construction works would be allowed to proceed.

#### 4.5.7 Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park

The Park is identified as a Strategic Environment Resource in the Structure Plan and the Renfrewshire Local Plan recognises it as having a role as a major recreational and tourist resource, which is to be safeguarded from unacceptable development and enhanced wherever possible.

## 4.6 Land Ownership

- 4.6.1 Figure No 2 indicates the land ownerships of the Castle Semple Loch and its environs. The plan shows that the Renfrewshire Council owns land completely around the loch. The establishment, therefore, of a path completely encircling the loch should not fail on land ownership issues. However, to establish or complete a number of desirable links to features of interest or create circular routes, the agreement and cooperation of adjacent landowners will be required.

## 4.7 Flooding and the Three Lochs Project

The objective of the partnership project is:-

To manage and enhance the three lochs of Kilbirnie, Barr, and Castle Semple and their catchment as an exemplar of integrated catchment management on a sustainable basis to deliver economic, environmental, and social benefits to the area, its inhabitants, and visitors.

Our review of the Three Lochs Project Draft Report has identified the following issues:-

The normal water level in the Castle Semple Loch is controlled by the Elliston Weir on the Black Cart a short distance downstream from the Loch.

The construction of the Elliston Weir has resulted in higher water levels within Castle Semple Loch and the subsequent breaching of the existing earth embankments surrounding Barr Loch.

Water flows into Castle Semple Loch from the River Calder, Dubbs Water and Millbank Burn, which has been diverted around the west bank of Barr Loch.

In addition, the surface runoff from the immediate catchment area around the Loch contributes to the water level.

The report records the “Barr Loch’s only formal connection to adjacent water courses is via a dismantled sluice gate at its north eastern end connecting Barr Loch with Millbank Burn and subsequently Castle Semple”. Further the report notes “water levels in Barr Loch are directly controlled by conditions within Castle Semple”.

The draft of the Three Loch’s Project report does not highlight any specific zones prone to flooding around Castle Semple Loch. However, we are aware of the intermittent backing up of water behind the Calder Bridge and its escape route through the sports field exiting at the car park entrance. Proposed dredging of the river at the bridge should help to mitigate this problem.

Another area subject to flooding is the dirt track on the north shore below Low Semple where ground levels are very close to the normal Loch level.

The draft report is Phase 1 of the Three Lochs Project and incorporates a preliminary Hydrological review. It is proposed that Phase 2 will review current engineering structures and identification of engineering options for establishing water level control.

#### **4.8 Existing Usage and Visitor Numbers**

- 4.8.1 Visitor numbers and details of visitors are notoriously scarce for recreational and tourist facilities in general. Castle Semple Centre, Lochwinnoch Village, and the RSPB Centre are no exceptions. There is very little accurate information about total visitor numbers, who they are, where do they come from etc., etc. This makes forecasting and justifying the allocation of resources an extremely difficult task.
- 4.8.2 We understand that Sustrans are currently installing people/cycle automatic counters along the recently upgraded cycle path, and that one is going in near the entrance to Parkhill Woods. Combined with a selected number of visitor interviews, those counters will be able to provide invaluable information on the usage and economic spin-offs and benefits of the cycle track. It would be of enormous benefit if counters could be installed at the start of the already popular and busy loch side route from Castle Semple Centre to the Parkhill Woods turnoff.
- 4.8.3 Visitor numbers going into the Castle Semple Water Centre are recorded by the reception staff and are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

**Visitor Numbers from 1999 – 2003**  
**Visitor Numbers INTO Castle Semple Visitor Centre**

<b>Month</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
<b>January</b>	--	2299	1756	2178	2743*
<b>February</b>	--	2131	2252	1989	4575*
<b>March</b>	--	2690	238	4539	5745*
<b>April</b>	3369	4614	--	6988	7417*
<b>May</b>	6064	6616	5860	7638	
<b>June</b>	6181	4510	5430	7115	
<b>July</b>	9811	8572	9009	9916	
<b>August</b>	6755	6321	7418	9524	
<b>September</b>	4200	3810	6377	8152*	
<b>October</b>	3217	2232	3145	4708*	
<b>November</b>	1643	1319	2142	2531*	
<b>December</b>	1137	1534	2541	2769*	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>42377</b>	<b>46648</b>	<b>46168</b>	<b>68047*</b>	

--	→ Numbers not available
Oct 00 – Mar 01	→ Centre closed Mondays & Fridays
06.03.01 – 04.05.01	→ Closed to public Foot & Mouth Disease
May 2002 onwards	→ Centre Open Daily
*	→ Numbers swelled by Free Activities programme until May 2002

4.8.4 Table 1 shows that visitor numbers to the Centre are already significant and rising steadily if allowance is to be made for the 2 months lost in 2001 for Foot and Mouth. This year looks set to show an increase on 2002, and given the fine weather in March 2003 and a nearly full car park on fine weekdays well into April, the existing capacity to cope with visitor demand looks stretched. We believe that the Centre will benefit from the improvements made to the cycle track which is encouraging walkers, in particular, to walk along the also improved loch side path to Blackditch Bay to join the cycle track and walk back to the village. This is a buggy and children's bicycle-friendly route of just under an hours duration and provides a variety of views and scenery. It emphasises the value of good hard surfaces (even in a rural situation), the ability to return to where one started from i.e. a circular route, gentle topography, the presence of a refreshment facility, and a convenient car park. It suggests that the establishment of additional circular routes from the Centre, including routes that take in Lochwinnoch village, would be extremely popular and well used.

- 4.8.5 Turnover figures in the café/shop in the Centre also reflect the increasing numbers of visitors. Thus from 1999 to 2000, turnover increased by 27%, from 2000 to 2001 by 10%, and from 2001 to 2002 by some 57%. It is understood that turnover is currently in the order of £60,000 p.a. or approximately £1 per head spend. Increasing visitor numbers will raise the turnover as will the continuing improvement in product range and merchandising.
- 4.8.6 Visitor numbers to the Centre are used to estimate the number of visits to the car park. These are currently estimated at 250,000 per annum. This is a very large figure indeed and it is a clear indication of the popularity of the car park with its views over the loch and resident ducks and swans fed by the visitors. We would also suggest that neither signage nor the access along Lochlip Road encourages visitors to turn off the busy A760 to Largs to find out what Castle Semple has to offer to the day visitor. We also suggest that both the Centre and the village are possibly losing an opportunity to encourage visitor spend.
- 4.8.7 Sustrans used to take visitor counts on selected Sunday afternoons at a point where the path crosses from Blackditch Bay to Parkhill Woods. The counts took place between 12 noon and 5 pm, and are reproduced in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

**Cycle Route Visitor Counts, Blackditch Burn  
Sundays 12 – 5pm**

Month	Year					Average
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	
January	165	144	150	232	198	177
April	932*	304	445	505	403	489
June	--	--	--	--	652	--
July	345	278	389	259	--	384
September	--	467**	432**	499**	--	397
October	311	--	--	--	449**	--
Totals	1753	1193	1416	1495	1702	

\* Easter Weekend

\*\* Sponsored Cycle Runs

NB Figures collected by Derek Mullins, Sustrans Ranger  
as far as possible, return journeys were not counted

- 4.8.8 In discussion with Mr Mullins and using the above figures, we come to a view that it would be reasonable to assume a figure of 2000 users per month for the 5 winter months, and 5500 for the remaining 7, making an estimated 48,500 users per annum. It is thought that this figure is conservative. We then took the 1995 figure and assumed a 5% per annum increase in use which suggests a visitor count figure approaching an estimated 65,000 per annum, which again, Mr Mullins felt could be conservative. The impact on usage as a result of the recent improvement is thought to be significant.
- 4.8.9 The figures in Table 2 indicate the value of organised events. There are some 20 of these during May, June, and July, and they include pedalling picnics, sponsored cycle runs, and walks. A “round the loch” route could be extremely popular for sponsored events.
- 4.8.10 It is not possible to indicate whether these visitors, or what percentage of them, emanate from the Castle Semple car park. However, some will be additional and swell the already high number of visits to the car park.
- 4.8.11 The RSPB also monitor visitor numbers to the Nature Centre, and they are set out in Table 3.

**Table 3**

**Visitor Numbers – RSPB Nature Reserve**

<b>Month</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
<b>January</b>	2128	2350	2131	2186
<b>February</b>	2064	1938	2335	2218
<b>March</b>	1635	2093	1376	3397
<b>April</b>	1826	2174	1986	3045
<b>May</b>	2260	1765	2813	3051
<b>June</b>	3119	2781	3505	4027
<b>July</b>	1974	2925	2953	2690
<b>August</b>	2642	2027	2399	2992
<b>September</b>	1532	1485	3216	3260
<b>October</b>	2644	2036	2339	3117
<b>November</b>	2526	2171	2720	3049
<b>December</b>	1685	2000	3146	3100
<b>Totals</b>	<b>26025</b>	<b>25744</b>	<b>30919</b>	<b>36114</b>

- 4.8.12 The increasing numbers of visitors is clearly following the trends at Castle Semple, and is to be welcomed. Like Castle Semple, however, car parking is barely adequate on busy days and when popular events are being held parking overflows to the station access road. (As is mentioned elsewhere in this study, crossing the A760 on foot in this area is hazardous). The RSPB have a busy events programme (see Appendix 4), which certainly helps boost visitor numbers.

4.8.13 Currently the RSPB charge non-members to use the paths in the Reserve. Enhancing the path and making it “public” will lead to a loss of this income but it should be offset by increased shop turnover and membership sales.

4.8.14 The RSPB do know something about their visitors from a Reserve Visitor Survey in 1998. Some of the main findings are as follows:-

- 66% of visitors live locally
  - 20% were on a day trip
  - 12% were on holiday or staying with friends locally
- 93% arrived by car, only 3% by train, and 1% by bicycle. Clearly a great deal of room for improvement here, but 1 in 10 of car borne visitors said they had considered alternative transport. This clearly offers hope that an improved train service, SPT marketing initiatives, and an improved path to the village would encourage visitors to give their car a day off, and come to the Reserve by train, bicycle or on foot.
- whilst 69% of visitors came to “look at birds generally”, 42% also included “going for a walk” as a reason for their visit.
  - in terms of activities undertaken “following a nature trail” at 76% is the second most popular activity to looking around the visitor centre and displays.
  - Lochwinnoch is classed as a “family” orientated reserve and the majority of visitors stayed for between 1 and 3 hours. An extended and improved path network could both increase the popularity of the Reserve and extend the time visitors spend there.
  - 1 in 6 to 1 in 7 visitors to the Reserve purchased petrol, meals or drinks in pubs, cafes or restaurants, or non-food items from local shops as a result of their visit. This could make a small but significant contribution to the local economy (local is defined as a 20 mile radius of the Reserve)
  - Visitors generally enjoyed their visit and rated the services and facilities highly. The majority felt they had learned something about the RSPB and conservation work at the Reserve.

4.8.15 The capacity of the present RSPB building to accept more visitors, and the life of the structure is, we understand, an issue that will have to be considered in the next few years. Although a radical move, it could be worthwhile considering the RSPB and Castle Semple Centre sharing the same site, if not the same building.

4.8.16 Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority (SPT) were only able to provide limited information regarding passenger numbers using Lochwinnoch Station, and those supplied are for winter use. We presume that the figures would be higher in the summer, as it is more pleasant, and safer to walk to and from the station, and the wait outside for the train, connecting bus or lift, is less of an ordeal. It would have been useful to have had some summer figures for comparison to see whether the above assumptions are correct.

4.8.17 Table 4 displays the figures as received:-

Table 4

**SPT Figures for Winter Use of Lochwinnoch Station  
Winter 1997/1998**

	From City		To City		Combined		Total
	On	Off	On	Off	On	Off	
<b>Weekday</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>86</b>

**Winter 2000/2001**

	From City		To City		Combined		Total
	On	Off	On	Off	On	Off	
<b>Weekday</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>277</b>
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>112</b>

4.8.18 The table shows an increase in passengers using the station. From observation, the fairly recent installation of CCTV cameras for the parking area, and a passenger information service has led to more all-day parking indicating increased commuter use. We believe that improved facilities at the station, a safe pedestrian and cycle route from the village, the added attraction of the round the loch footpath, enhanced marketing, and a more frequent service could significantly boost user numbers.

4.8.19 Whilst the individual daily numbers using the station appear small, multiplying them up to a whole year indicates some substantial passenger movements and, as already mentioned, these are based on winter passenger counts. Thus, in 1997/1998 total passenger movements totalled 73,164, and for 2000/2001, 88660.

4.8.20 Figures for the new station at Howwood were not obtained, but from observation, the passenger numbers must be very low. In terms of the possible local footpath and cycle track network however, the location of the station is a major bonus to the path network in that it is a further link to a public transport system.



## **4.9 Car Parking**

- 4.9.1. There are 4 formal or recognised parking areas in the study area, namely, Lochwinnoch Station, the RSPB; the Annexe at the playing fields on Lochlip Road; and Castle Semple Centre.
- 4.9.2. Castle Semple and the Annexe car parking areas are surfaced with tarmac, the RSPB with bound gravel/type 1, and the station is a mix of tarmac and loose gravel. None are white lined or indicate parking bay demarcation, so theoretical capacities are rarely achieved. It is a matter of fact, however, that both the RSPB (40 cars), and Castle Semple (140 cars) car parks are at peak capacity on a fairly regular basis. The RSPB have space for a limited expansion of parking, but Castle Semple cannot expand without moving some or all of the old railway embankment (route of the cycle track) that runs between Gates Road and the Centre. Concept plans do exist that incorporate the idea, but they have not progressed beyond the ideas stage. The station car park is roughly the space left over after accommodating bus circulation requirements. The area available for car parking is extremely small and an awkward shape which limits actual capacity to less than 20 cars. Once owned railway land adjacent to the car park has been disposed of and the current owner is unlikely to sell back any land to expand the car park at a reasonable price. The parking area at the Annexe tends only to be used by users of the facilities and it is rarely full. The entrance gives the appearance of not being 'public' and is not often used by visitors to the village. There is however, space for expansion by at least 20 spaces and improvement of the existing parking area all of which is Council owned.
- 4.9.3. Parking in the village consists mainly of on-street parking other than a car park at the rear of the village hall (40 cars) and another behind the library (5 cars). Both are often full and additional off-street parking close to the centre of the village could be extremely beneficial for local business and in taking cars off the street in a conservation area.

## **4.10 Existing Interpretation**

- 4.10.1 A substantial amount of interpretation already exists mainly at the Castle Semple Centre and at the RSPB Reserve. There are also a number of signs around the village giving historical and wildlife information. These are sited outside the library, on the cycle track at Barr Castle, and beside Kenmure. There is a short history of the Collegiate Church, written by Historic Scotland on an information board within the Church grounds.
- 4.10.2 The Castle Semple Centre has limited interpretation within the building at the moment. They have an information map outside the centre showing where to walk within the park and also a number of leaflets giving information on walks in the area, a "What's On" leaflet, and the "Parkhill Wood Challenge" for children.

- 4.10.3 The RSPB centre has various methods of interpreting the site. There is a large RSPB Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve sign at the entrance, an RSPB logo on the wall and a site map outside with some information on the wildlife and events on the reserve. There is a large viewing window with telescopes and information on the birds that can be seen from the window. In the same room, there is a mural giving information on the invertebrates and other water life found in the ponds and loch. Videos of birds are played in the shop and interactive computer programmes on birds are available to the public. The tower has interactive displays for children. The tower also has information on Alexander Wilson, the famous local poet and naturalist. Leaflets include a variety of information leaflets on birds, a reserve leaflet with map and wildlife information, a Lochwinnoch birds checklist, the wildlife garden, and an events leaflet. In Spring, there is usually a live video link from a nest box.
- 4.10.4 For both the RSPB and Castle Semple, much of the interpretation is carried out by the staff via a programme of guided walks and talks to interpret the wildlife and history of the area, and by simply just talking to visitors.
- 4.10.5 Interpretation is also part of the work programme by countryside rangers/RSPB and Starling Learning on their environmental education programmes for schools and other groups. Starling Learning holds a bank of information on local wildlife and how to interpret it to school children.

#### **4.11 SUSTRANS National Cycle Route 7**

- 4.11.1 Sustrans – the sustainable transport charity – works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport in order to reduce motor traffic and its adverse effects. It offers a healthy alternative to the car.
- 4.11.2 Sustrans promotes a number of projects relevant to this study, for example, Safe Routes to Schools, Safe Routes to Stations, Active Travel, and Public Art in the Travelling Landscape. It is also in the process of launching a Cycle Tourism Strategy for Scotland.
- 4.11.3 Lochwinnoch is fortunate in having the National Route 7, known as the Lochs and Glens Cycle Route (south) pass through the village. The 213-mile route joins Glasgow and Carlisle, and there are increasing numbers of cycle tourists from the UK and abroad taking advantage of the 10,000-mile national cycle network. Like long distance walkers, cyclists require food and accommodation along the route and the economic spin-off can be substantial. Lochwinnoch is doubly lucky in that the Scottish Executive granted SUSTRANS enough monies to upgrade 22 miles of paths southwest of Glasgow, thus the track has been hard surfaced from Kilbirnie to Paisley, and beyond (Photo No 6). Counters have also been installed along the route, which will provide hard information on usage.

4.11.4 The hard surfacing of the track coupled with exceptional weather in March has already resulted in an estimated local doubling of path users. Safe and easy access to Castle Semple from Kilbirnie and Glengarnock in Ayrshire to Kilbarchan, Johnstone Linwood, Bridge of Weir, Kilmacolm, and Paisley in Renfrewshire, and beyond is now possible. However, for reasons outlined in section 6, there is now a pressing need to create a safe link between the cycle route, Castle Semple Centre, the village, RSPB, and Lochwinnoch Station. The linking of Howwood Station to this network would also be a positive benefit.

It was also recognised that this project could be the catalyst in transforming Castle Semple and Lochwinnoch into a major recreational destination.