

Renfrewshire Council

South Renfrewshire Access Network Initiative

Interpretive Masterplan

Final Report

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1 Introduction

Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants are grateful to Renfrewshire Council for appointing us, jointly with Aaron Lawton Associates and Jo Scott, to prepare an Interpretive Masterplan for the area of land encompassed by the South Renfrewshire Access Network Initiative [SRANI] and for their support throughout the project. This is our final report and represents both our general and our specific approach, developed from many site visits, consultative meetings primarily with members of the SRANI management group and helpful comments made by members of the local community.

The brief

Our brief, provided on behalf of the SRANI group by Renfrewshire Council, asked us to prepare an Interpretive Masterplan that would achieve the group's interpretive vision – that good interpretation will transform the simple path network, which SRANI is developing, into a significant destination that will stimulate repeat visits throughout the year. SRANI is looking for a 'wow' factor, generated not necessarily by high spending but by good ideas that will create world-class interpretation, irrespective of whether the delivery is low-tech or budgets modest.

2 This report

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3 Background and context

The project and its study area

SRANI is a multi-agency project in South Renfrewshire whose partners include Renfrewshire Council, Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire, Scottish Natural Heritage, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, Sustrans, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds [RSPB], local community councils and community groups.

The SRANI project's purpose is clearly defined as being to develop a comprehensive paths and related access network around the Lochwinnoch, Castle Semple Loch and Howwood area and one that, when fully achieved, will contribute to the increased well-being, environmental appeal and overall economic achievement of the Lochwinnoch area. SRANI is not, however, an economic development initiative per se and its success lies in adhering to its remit while encouraging others to take the lead in promoting and implementing broadly supportive actions and activities.

Our recommendations and comments in this report sometimes straddle this division because we were asked to look at the study area holistically. In that context, we refer later to a response to local consultation that involved a development proposal.

The study area

The physical boundaries of the SRANI project area are in effect defined by the various walking and cycling routes, including the round-the-loch path, and extend to the railway line to the east of Castle Semple Loch, between a new crossing point over the Black Cart just beyond the eastern end of the loch and where it crosses the A760 at the western end, near Lochwinnoch Station. The western boundary follows the road from the station to the village and encompasses Lochwinnoch, and then takes in Park Hill, the Collegiate Church, the Castle Semple site and Kenmure Temple before dropping back down to the Cart. Most of the project area is within Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park.

The project's purpose is to improve facilities for access to the countryside and communities in the Lochwinnoch area. In particular it aims to improve pedestrian and cycle access from the village of Lochwinnoch to the nearby railway station, and to establish a route around Castle Semple Loch with links to Howwood and into other parts of Clyde Muirshiel Park.

The feasibility study undertaken by Ross Anderson Consultancy in 2003 identified the various site works required to create the routes. Phase I of the infrastructure works – linking the RSPB reserve to the River Calder bridge – has now been completed, and the second phase – linking the bridge to Castle Semple Centre – is now well under way. Extensive consultations have been carried out to determine the route around the Loch and a walking route that leaves the lochside to include High Kenmure¹ Hill has been promulgated. Overall, the support from the community for the new route has been very positive. However, following objections, the new walking route will not follow the lochside past the houses on the former Castle Semple site and this seems to us to be a major deficiency.

We make a recommendation later in this report in relation to the route of the round-the-Loch path.

The boundary for the Interpretive Masterplan is greater than the core SRANI area because it needs to consider and include the wider landscape setting, the villages of Lochwinnoch and Howwood (and the links between them), the views to the skyline, the Barr Loch (both as a view over the Loch and its potential inclusion as an area with footpaths), as well as, intellectually, other people, places and artefacts in Scotland and across the world that are essential elements in the story of this site.

Lochwinnoch and its environs

Lochwinnoch, lying about ten miles south west of Paisley and just 20 miles from the centre of Glasgow, is a popular and thriving village with a population of just over 2,000. The origins of its name are variously attributed to 'the loch of the wild fowl' or to 'loch of St Wynnin or Finnian' (cf Kilwinning). The name was noted as Lochynoc in 1158² and there are map references to a church here dating back to at least 1654. The gable end of St John's (sometimes referred to as St Winnoc's)

¹ We have used current and Ordnance Survey spellings for Kenmure, Semple, Macdowall etc except where the context demands alternative spellings such as Kenmuir, Sempill and MacDougall.

² References to St Wynnin or Finnian, Kilwinning, Lochynoc and 1158 are taken from David Ross's *Scottish Place-names*.

Church, was built in 1729 and is a later remnant of the original church. It stands beside the original village cross and is now known as Auld Simon, after the church bell that hangs there.

Not far from the village are the ruins of Barr Castle whose original owners also gave their name to the Barr Loch, now a separate body of water from Lochwinnoch and also managed by the RSPB.

The village stands on the banks of the River Calder, and these waters were used to power grain, cotton and linen mills during the industrial revolution. Silk was also woven here from 1900, and the silk mill only ceased operation in 1985. Lochwinnoch was also a centre for bleaching cloth and the manufacture of furniture, the latter produced for some of the world's finest ships, including the *Lusitania*, the Queen Mary and the *Titanic*. The village was once regarded as the curling capital of the world, having two curling stone manufacturers and the sport was played on the loch. Until recently, a substantial cooperage occupied a large site in the middle of the village.

Lochwinnoch grew considerably in size from the later 1700s as the number of mills increased and accommodation was needed for the workforce, and eventually it merged with the next village, Newton of Barr. Its highlights include the Calder waterfall, the striking primary school, Auld Simon, the Dumb Proctor³, Harvey Square and the various mill buildings.

Lochwinnoch is separated from Castle Semple Loch by the high embankment of the former Glasgow and Southwestern Railway line. This is now part of the Sustrans National Cycle Route 7, which links Inverness to Carlisle via Glasgow and Glen Trool (Lochs and Glens Route). Apart from short sections along Lochlip Road in Lochwinnoch, the route from Paisley to Kilbirnie⁴ is all traffic free and, with SRANI's improvements currently taking place to link Lochwinnoch village with its station, the cycleway will shortly be re-routed to make the entire route off-road.

The historic core of Lochwinnoch is a conservation area, which has preserved much of its 18th century character and its original sense of identity, with a pleasing mix of small-scale buildings in various forms and period styles. A number of its distinctive historic buildings have been sympathetically converted into homes and businesses.

However, many village centre buildings appear down-at-heel as a result of lack of routine maintenance and inappropriate use of uPVC replacement windows. Also, although is an interesting village to explore on foot or by bike, there is currently little encouragement to do so, particularly from the lochside. Interpretation within the village is limited to a rather tired and faded graphic panel outside the library.

Overall, the village offers a variety of retail and catering outlets many of which have little external appeal, however good their range of products and services may be.

We make a series of recommendations later in this report in relation to the village's environment and interpretation within it.

³ An early Christian monument used as a headstone in Lochwinnoch Cemetery. It is very worn now but is carved with Biblical scenes

⁴ See <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/webfiles/leaflets/LOCHWINNOCH%202004.pdf> to download the Sustrans leaflet for the 'Lochwinnoch Loop Line' route from Paisley to Kilbirnie

Howwood Village

Howwood lies about three miles north east of Lochwinnoch. Originally a farming community, it owes its development as a former industrial village to the bleaching and cotton finishing trades which have long since disappeared along with much of the evidence. The village is now substantially residential with limited amenities – a post office and a general store, a well-known inn and a health club. The railway station has recently been re-opened and is well-regarded as an amenity by local people. It is fully accessible by those in wheelchairs and with prams.

Howwood's name is derived from 'hollow in the wood', possibly Skiff Wood which is overlooked by Walls Hill, on which stood a major fortified settlement of the Celtic Damnonii tribe. The ruins of Elliston (or Elziotstoun) Tower, the Semple family's first medieval fortress on lands given by James III, stand close to the village.

In recent years, local effort has improved the appearance of the village, with an attractive landscaped 'triangle' near the main road junction. A large panel illustrates three main walking routes which have been developed by Howwood Wildlife and Woodlands (a local charity). One route follows the Black Cart Water to link the village with the Fancy Bridge on the former Castle Semple Estate, with a spur leading to the temple on top of Kenmure Hill with a marked route down to the Sustrans cycle path to Lochwinnoch.

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park

Lochwinnoch village lies on the edge of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, formally designated in 1990. The Park, run by Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority, extends from Greenock in the north, down the Clyde to Inverkip, Largs and West Kilbride and inland to Lochwinnoch. It covers a total of 108 square miles of countryside and its principal role is to provide countryside management that balances conservation with recreation. It is a Category V Protected Landscape Area and includes five Sites of Special Scientific Interest [SSSIs], one of which is Castle Semple Loch.

The Park has two of its three visitor centres close to Lochwinnoch: the Muirshiel Centre a few miles north west of the village, currently promoting its live CCTV links to a hen harrier's nest; and the Castle Semple Centre on the shore of the loch. The latter falls within our study area and is one of the key resources for visitors and local people and a focus for activity.

Castle Semple Country Park, Loch and Centre

The Castle Semple Centre is the focal point of what is formally called the Castle Semple Country Park. The Park is more generally referred to as Castle Semple Loch to avoid confusion with Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park of which it forms part.

The Castle Semple Centre has a well-used car park, a busy café and shop, limited interpretation inside and out, and a range of facilities for outdoor activities. It is also a base for several of the Park's rangers and other staff, and part of the café / shop area is used for temporary displays, meetings and group activities. The building's distinctive observation tower, originally designed to offer a vantage point for watersports staff as well as for visitors, has proved impractical to use and is no longer publicly accessible.

In addition to informal activities in the vicinity of the Loch, such as picnicking, walking, cycling and bird-watching, the Centre offers outdoor activity courses, taster sessions in sailing, canoeing, kayaking, raft building, archery, mountain biking, map and compass work and activities associated with the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Bikes and boats can be hired at the Centre, fishing permits are on sale and non-powered craft can launch from here.

Castle Semple Country Park site receives an estimated 350,000 visits a year. The Centre itself is very popular, attracting a quarter of the visits to the Park at over 83,000⁵ in 2005, and its 140-space car park is often full. Our experience of the site confirms its popularity: on each of our visits, regardless of the weather, the day of the week or time of day, the Centre foreshore has been busy and buzzing, particularly with groups. The café within the Centre is also well used by individuals, families and groups, and the staff are friendly and welcoming. Local people – and visitors – obviously value the beauty of the loch and many seem content simply to sit in their cars and enjoy the view, or to stroll along the water's edge and feed the swans.

The Park team – and Lochwinnoch as a whole – should be commended for the overall quality of service provided and the wide variety and regularity of the events on offer. The whiteboard outside the Centre shows the different activities available and recent wildlife sightings, and the Lochwinnoch village website (www.lochwinnoch.info) presents the many and diverse activities available to visitors and local people alike (along with a wealth of other information).

It is clear that the Centre is a valuable resource for the area, particularly for local people and visitors from the region; many come frequently. Due in part to its prime waterside location, the design of the attractive building with its viewing tower, and the plethora of equipment stored alongside it, the Centre has a feeling of a busy 'clubhouse'. While this is obviously very successful with those who are familiar with the site, arguably the clubhouse feel is less welcoming for first time visitors – there is a slight sense of uncertainty; of not knowing exactly where to go and what to do; of not quite being 'part of the club'.

Because its immediate surroundings and some of its internal spaces are largely tailored to the needs of watersports and other special interest activities and groups, the Centre's environment no longer provides an appropriately high quality experience for the leisure visitors who make up around 95% of the audience. In addition, the limited interpretation within and outwith the building is dated and easy to miss, which adds to the impression that this is not strictly a 'visitor' centre.

A wide range of attractions now vie for visitors' leisure time and disposable income and the Castle Semple Centre is in competition for time as well as money with Braehead, including Xscape, Irvine's Magnum Centre, Paisley Abbey, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, golf courses and many other high quality leisure and tourism attractions. Standards amongst these attractions are generally high – some are setting new standards – and so the Castle Semple Centre must raise its overall standards to remain competitive within the wider regional leisure market.

⁵ Throughout the report, references to visits and visitors should be taken to include local people when visiting or using the local facilities and services unless a specific distinction is made.

The main issues to address with regard to the Centre's environments are:

- ◆ The exterior arrival and direction signing at the site entrance and Visitor Centre building are of low quality and provide a poor impression of the overall appeal. A plethora of signs from a variety of organisations and various barriers associated with the cycle route at the entrance to the site create artefact clutter and significantly degrade this important area. The car parking facilities are inadequate for the number of visitors coming to the site at weekends and there is the risk that car parking will encroach on the pedestrian environment to the front of the centre, although this is strongly discouraged. The existing available car parking space is not well utilised, although rationalisation and indicative marking of bays (eg by posts at the rear of each space) would increase its capacity significantly.
- ◆ The space between the Centre building and the loch is the most valuable area for the passive outdoor leisure pursuits favoured by the vast majority of visitors. This area provides the foreground for the view of the loch from within the Centre and is where most people want to sit, eat, drink and congregate in good weather. However, this area is currently an expanse of unattractive tarmac necessarily dedicated to the requirements of water-safety access, delivery vehicles and needs of the active outdoor pursuits favoured by around 5% of visitors. There is obviously potential to create a high quality setting for the centre by turning this key area into an attractive waterfront space catering to the passive leisure needs of all visitors if suitable arrangements could be made in the adjoining area beyond the Centre for the specific active needs mentioned above.
- ◆ The compound used by the Park and various watersports clubs to store vessels and other equipment forms a rather unsightly feature adjacent to the Visitor Centre and between it and the start of the main lochside path (although it is 'tidy' in itself). The compound is surrounded by an industrial chain-link and barbed wire fence, against which redundant equipment and rusting containers are stored. Opportunities for pulling this storage area back from its current prime waterfront location should be investigated, along with more attractive fencing and screening, the provision of planters etc to improve the view of the area.
- ◆ The exterior toilets at the Centre are intended for use by outdoor activity participants and are not of a suitable style or standard for leisure visitors who do use them. There are more suitable toilets for the latter group inside the building, however, which have facilities for baby-changing, disabled visitors etc.



An opportunity now exists to review how space is used inside and outside the centre, bearing in mind its prime waterside location, the expectations of existing and potential customers, and the organisational objectives of the Park.

We make a series of recommendations later in this report in relation to the Castle Semple Centre's environment and to interpretation within and around it.

The RSPB Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve

The Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve is one of only three of its sites in Scotland that are nationally promoted by the RSPB and it attracts around 40,000 visitors each year. It also offers an environmental education programme, which brings over 100 school groups a year to the site.

The Reserve forms part of the Castle Semple SSSI because of its importance as one of the few remaining wetland sites in Scotland, and includes Aird Meadow and Aird Meadow Loch, adjacent to Castle Semple Loch, and the Barr Loch on the other side of the A760. These areas encompass marshland, woodland, the shallow lochs with wet meadows and ponds surrounded by sedge beds.

The first phase of works by SRANI, in association with related road works, has provided a safe, traffic free route from Lochwinnoch and the Castle Semple Centre to the Nature Reserve. The Visitor Centre building is well signposted and has parking for around 40 cars, although the quality of the car park could be improved.

The Reserve and Visitor Centre offer a welcome and orientation leaflet, a comprehensive shop specialising in optical equipment, natural history books and wild bird care products, two fully accessible trails with hides / viewpoints, a feeding station, a wildlife garden, a dipping pond, a picnic area, some refreshments and a range of regular activities. Entry to the Visitor Centre is free and, for visitors who come by public transport, entry to the Reserve is free as well. However, a small charge is made to non-members for the trails and hides, and binoculars are available for hire. Children can also take an RSPB explorer pack at no charge – this includes bug boxes, binoculars, identification sheets, an activity book, pencils and crayons. Many visitors take advantage of personal contact with staff who provide information and interpretation informally.

The Centre building has a ground level observation window with telescopes, overlooking the feeding station and the loch beyond, and a seating area with printed material, a computer terminal and CCTV monitors. A first-floor viewing tower is equipped with further telescopes, graphic panels, child-friendly interactives and quiz sheets to complete.

Conservation management of the Reserve primarily involves managing Aird Meadow for breeding birds and wintering wildfowl. In addition to the nearly 200 species of birds recorded, visitors may also spot over 20 species of mammal and over 100 species of moth as well as dragonflies, damselflies and many butterflies.

The Reserve offers year-round interest for knowledgeable birders and casual visitors alike, and the RSPB team works hard to encourage a range of users, particularly children and families, to the site. Its visitors are recorded as being particularly appreciative of the warm welcome and wealth of information they receive from the staff at the Reserve.

The RSPB Visitor Centre forms a popular attraction and a very valuable asset for local people and visitors to the area. Like the Castle Semple Centre, the RSPB Centre also acts as a key gateway to the Lochwinnoch area and the Regional Park for visitors, and both centres provide orientation and information about what to see and do in the area.

However, the RSPB Centre's internal and external environments are now looking very tired and are in desperate need of updating if the Centre is to continue in use. We understand the building may be approaching the end of its design life, although we believe a comprehensive upgrade is likely to extend its useful life significantly.

The car park currently provides a very poor first impression of the facility. The margins are severely overgrown and the parking space is badly surfaced, with pot-holes and piles of redundant gravel. The layout for car parking is adequate, although it needs much better provision for the delivery of goods. The car park may also require expansion to cope with increased visitor numbers and extended dwell time if the Visitor Centre facilities are upgraded.

The Visitor Centre building is generally attractive, although it requires modernisation and maintenance work. The colour of the exterior timberwork might be changed to provide a more up-to-date look. The appearance of the roofs should be improved by removing the moss, replacing new slates with reclaimed ones to match the originals and re-setting the main ridge. The proliferation of notices and fittings (lights, cameras, etc) should also be rationalised and the exterior appearance generally tidied up.

In addition, the interior layout does not currently make best use of the available space, views and opportunities. The Visitor Centre was built in the 1970s and the fixed interpretation is largely limited to the interior of the building and is becoming rather tired and dated. While the tower is a valuable resource, with its excellent views over the loch, it is only accessible via stairs. The interpretive panels are very worn and do not do justice to the views and wildlife that can be seen from there. There is no interpretation along the trails or at the hides and viewpoints and, due to the site's experience of accidental and deliberate damage, any new installations outside the main building would have to be very robust.



We make a series of recommendations later in this report in relation to the RSPB Nature Reserve Visitor Centre's environment and interpretation in and around it.

Cafés and shops

The Castle Semple Centre café currently falls some way short of the standards expected by many leisure visitors, both in terms of its ambience and many of its product lines. An opportunity may now exist to develop a higher quality contemporary café experience in line with the expectations of today's leisure visitors. One possibility is to create additional windows in the exhibition space and extend the café into this area for 'overspill' use (eg when not required for meetings or temporary displays), while improving the quality of the environment and food on offer.

The small self-service café at Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve is probably adequate for dedicated birders, although it too could be improved to meet the needs of its other visitors. An opportunity may now exist to expand it into a full café facility occupying the central floor space and classroom area. This would take full advantage of the available views and provide another compelling reason for people to visit the Centre.

The shop at the Nature Reserve provides a good example of themed retail, as it stocks quality products that are heavily based around birds and bird watching. The Castle Semple Centre shop sells general giftware, a lot of which has no direct relevance to the area. We understand that this approach performs well financially and but it provides few interpretive and related benefits. The low quality of some of the product lines would not fit well with any future upgrading of the café and other facilities.

We make no specific comments about cafés and shops within Lochwinnoch village although we note the need to avoid direct competition between the café in the Castle Semple and catering outlets run by the community.

We make a series of recommendations later in this report in relation to the cafés and shops in the study area.

Exploring the former estate

The RSPB Nature Reserve and Castle Semple Centre are primary points of access for visitors to the lands of the former Castle Semple Estate and are moderately well signposted from main and local roads.

The former encourages and enables visitors to experience the natural highlights of the lochs and environs, while the latter provides a valuable focus for a variety of facilities for quiet enjoyment and active recreation. The development of the access network to enable local people and visitors to link these two key sites and to explore the environs of Castle Semple Loch more easily is very exciting. It is confidently expected that these circular walking and cycling routes will add value to the current experience, encourage greater numbers from the region and further afield to come to the area and also to make commuting on foot and by bike considerably easier.

It is also hoped that the development and promotion of the new linked routes will encourage people both to explore and understand better the lands of the former Castle Semple Estate. The landscape that is seen and enjoyed today is the legacy of the families who have lived beside the loch – the Semples, the Macdowalls and the Harveys in particular. However, it is difficult at present to appreciate the scale and vision of these families and the considerable works they orchestrated to sculpt the landscape and to realise their practical, economic and aesthetic aspirations – particularly through the management and drainage of the lochs and waterways.

To date, interpretation of these stories across the project area is limited. Some insight into the former estate and its owners is provided by way of panels in the Castle Semple Centre, at the point where the footpath to Kenmure Temple joins the cycleway and at the Collegiate Church, as well as through guided tours and other events. Many books and papers have also been written about the families, the

groundworks and other aspects of the area's geology, history and ecology. However, these insights are unlikely to reach many of the area's most regular users, such as dog-walkers, local families, birdwatchers and those engaged in watersports.

The highlights of the former estate, which act as focal points along the new routes and will require more effective interpretation, include (in no particular order):

- ◆ The delightful **Parkhill Woods**, with their 18th century **grotto**, rhododendron **maze** and **viewpoint** over the length of the loch. The planting across the former estate contains remnants of the exotic species introduced by the various lairds, and this area is particularly varied.
- ◆ The **Collegiate Church** (A-listed building and scheduled ancient monument), a striking and well preserved ruin of 1504, with its tomb of John Semple who died at Flodden in 1513.
- ◆ The **fish ponds**, (18th century⁶) just beyond the church and used by the clergy at the former collegiate church to provide food. These ponds were cleared in 2000 by a group of young international volunteers and a new accessible path created.
- ◆ The **cave and ice house** (B-listed) – near the fish ponds are a cave, believed to have been used in the 18th century as a semi-natural ice house by the Semples, and a 19th century ice house added by the Macdowalls.
- ◆ **Kenmure Temple** (B-listed), an octagonal tower built in about 1760 by the Macdowalls above the eastern end of the Loch.
- ◆ The remains of **Castle Semple House** (B-listed) – the original Castle Semple was demolished in the 18th century and the new owners of the estate, the Macdowalls, built a mansion on the site. The house was largely destroyed by fire in the 1920s and the unstable façade was finally pulled down in the 1960s. The remaining wings and stables are now converted into private homes. This site is best viewed by boat from the loch.
- ◆ Courtshaw Hill – early Ordnance Survey maps show a small, hexagonal foghouse (fog meaning moss), probably a rustic shelter with a moss-covered roof reached by a path up the hill to a circular path round it. Its location could be plotted by GPS and archaeology but the area is at the mercy of ponticum. It would be worth exploring its story and we recommend later a look-out point from the Hill.
- ◆ The **tower** house of about 1550 (scheduled ancient monument) – the foundations of this defensive tower, incorrectly described as a peel tower and formerly on an island, now lie on a narrow strip of land between Aird Meadow and Castle Semple Lochs. Again, this atmospheric site is best reached by boat from the loch. However, although it can be accessed from the Dubbs Water Trail through the RSPB Reserve, this is discouraged because of the impact on wildlife along much of the route. Indeed, because of the current condition of the Tower, all access to it is discouraged on safety grounds until the structure is consolidated.
- ◆ Other **features** of the former estate, including Fancy Bridge, the estate wall and gates, and the walled garden, which is B-listed.
- ◆ Features of interest in and around Howwood include the ruins of **Elliston Tower**, from where the Semples moved to Castle Semple; a historic 18th-century

⁶ It has been suggested that the ponds date from the 16th century but there is no evidence to support this claim to date

inn; a former (unidentified) smithy and a few other buildings dating from the village's agricultural and industrial past.

Issues and opportunities for interpretation

As we noted previously, it is a key aspiration of the SRANI project to use interpretation to add value to the experience of exploring the environs of Castle Semple Loch. In conjunction with targeted marketing, good signage, high-quality environmental factors and positive local support, well-planned interpretation can indeed help to make the area into a significant destination with year-round appeal for first time visitors and repeat users alike.

To achieve this, the interpretation and other visitor infrastructure proposals need to consider how best to achieve the following results (in no particular order of priority):

- ◆ integrate the villages of Lochwinnoch and Howwood into the visitor experience, both physically and intellectually;
- ◆ appeal to regular, repeat users as well as first time and occasional visitors, so that the interpretive messages and media continue to be relevant, lively and inspiring;
- ◆ provide physical and intellectual access to the site, its highlights and its stories for all users;
- ◆ engage those groups and individuals who come here for a particular activity or pursuit, and who can be notoriously difficult to reach through traditional interpretive methods;
- ◆ offer opportunities for local people and visitors to be involved across the site, as users and as contributors, volunteers, staff, members and 'unofficial' interpreters;
- ◆ take into account the sensitivities of those who live and work around the loch and along the new routes;
- ◆ help people appreciate the nature of the landscape they can see and how and why the land and water have been managed in the past, today and into the future;
- ◆ encourage people to use the walks and rides responsibly and with consideration for others and for the flora and fauna that are found here;
- ◆ encourage people to use sustainable transport to get to Castle Semple Loch, and to explore its environs on foot or by bike.

We make a series of recommendations later in this report in relation to interpretation throughout the study area.

General environmental considerations

The quality of a destination's environments is usually a critical factor in its ability to attract visitors and, for many, it is the combination of their landscape setting, open and built spaces, buildings and environmental amenities that support the key attraction of the place. Visitors on leisure visits want to shop, eat, drink, walk, cycle, relax and discover, but they prefer to enjoy these activities in high quality surroundings. For this reason, improving the quality of the study area's environment

– and its access structures such as signs, gates, bridges and seats – should be a high priority alongside developing its interpretation facilities.

We make a series of recommendations on environmental improvements, access structures and interpretation media later in this report.

Signage

Signage in the study area is currently inadequate in a number of ways, including:

- ◆ Vehicle direction signs for the Castle Semple Centre and the RSPB Reserve use inconsistent naming, mix official and unofficial sign types, suggest indirect routes and omit signs at key junctions.
- ◆ Pedestrian direction signs to guide new visitors between the primary attractions and facilities are largely absent. A new system of direction signing will also be required for the proposed path network.
- ◆ Orientation panels to help visitors build a mental spatial model of the area, to locate themselves within it and to understand the direction and distance to features of interest are largely absent (bearing in mind how few people can carry a ‘map’ in their heads).
- ◆ Identification signs for Lochwinnoch village and the Castle Semple Centre are of poor visual quality.
- ◆ There is a new information panel in Howwood illustrating the routes of local walks, but without any interpretation.

An opportunity exists to provide a comprehensive system of vehicle and pedestrian signing for the whole study area. Vehicle direction signs must conform to official standards, but all other signs should be designed as part of a coordinated suite.

We make a series of recommendations on signage later in this report.

4 Natural and cultural resources

Although we have referred earlier to what might be termed the interpretive assets of the study area, it is worth summarising them here under a number of headings:

Natural and semi-natural history

- ◆ pleasant open countryside, combining woodland, marshland, wetland and waterways etc;
- ◆ lochs and rivers;
- ◆ rich wildlife, particularly birdlife;
- ◆ interesting geology;
- ◆ long tradition of agriculture;
- ◆ study area within a Protected Landscape Area;
- ◆ Castle Semple Loch SSSI;
- ◆ Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve.

Social and cultural history

- ◆ village of Lochwinnoch, now a conservation area;
- ◆ village of Howwood;
- ◆ former Castle Semple estate;
- ◆ history of the Semple, Macdowall and Harvey families;
- ◆ the scientific and artistic legacies of these families⁷ and other key local figures, such as Alexander Wilson, poet and ornithologist;
- ◆ many historic buildings and other structures in villages and former estate;
- ◆ evidence of extensive drainage and water management;
- ◆ strong industrial and trading heritage;
- ◆ the circle of artists, writers and craftspeople living and working in the area today.

Visitor facilities

- ◆ relatively easy access by road;
- ◆ relatively good access by rail (hourly service) with two local stations (although Lochwinnoch Station is not fully accessible by wheelchair and pushchair users);
- ◆ relatively good access by bus;
- ◆ good access for cyclists by national cycle route and local roads;
- ◆ improved foot and cycle path network including the paths initiative in and links to Howwood;
- ◆ Castle Semple Centre and associated leisure activities;
- ◆ RSPB Visitor Centre and Nature Reserve;
- ◆ some static interpretation;
- ◆ programme of walks, talks and other interpretive events;
- ◆ programmes of educational visits and activity training;
- ◆ staff at Castle Semple and RSPB Visitor Centres;
- ◆ shops, tearooms, eateries and other facilities in Lochwinnoch;
- ◆ shops in Howwood.

Collectively, the natural and cultural resources offer a substantial body of interpretive assets from which to develop presentational approaches, themes and topics using and enhancing the range of visitor facilities which exist.

⁷ For example, the writings in the 16th and 17th centuries of Robert Sempill, his son Robert Sempill the Younger and his grandson Francis, the last of whom is credited with inventing the word 'blatherskite'

5 The market

Visitor numbers

As the feasibility study of 2003 noted, it is difficult to identify the numbers and profiles of the users of the various elements in and around Lochwinnoch with any great certainty. Although the RSPB and the Castle Semple Centre gather some information about their own visitors, there is very little additional information that gives meaningful insight into those, for example, exploring Lochwinnoch village on foot or making use of the graphic panel on the cycleway at Kenmure.

However, by assessing the available information along with anecdotal evidence and our experiences on site, we can begin to determine the different audiences who are – and are not – making use of the various facilities at Castle Semple.

We are able to make some general estimates from site surveys, the feasibility study and discussions with the client team of the numbers using particular parts of the study area. It is important to treat these figures with some caution, however, as some of the statistical evidence on which they are based is up to ten years old.

<i>Site</i>	<i>Estimated number of visits p.a.</i>
Castle Semple Centre	83,000
Castle Semple Country Park	350,000
RSPB Visitor Centre	40,000
Cyclists at Blackditch Burn	65,000 ⁸
Lochwinnoch Station	90,000 ⁹

In terms of who these visitors are, where they come from and what they do when they come to the Lochwinnoch area, we are reliant on information specific to the RSPB Reserve and the Castle Semple Centre. This information tells us the following:

At the RSPB Reserve (in 1998):

- ◆ 66% of visitors lived locally;
- ◆ 20% were on a day trip;
- ◆ 12% were on holiday or staying with friends in the area;
- ◆ 69% came to ‘look at birds generally’; 42% also included ‘going for a walk’ as a reason for their visit;
- ◆ ‘looking around the Visitor Centre and displays’ and ‘following a nature trail’ were the two most popular activities undertaken.

⁸ Figure taken from the Feasibility Study and based on Sustrans visitor counts on selected Sunday afternoons at a point where the path crosses from Blackditch Bay to Parkhill Woods; these estimates included casual cyclists and those on organised events and the total was regarded by the Sustrans Ranger as conservative

⁹ NB: this annual figure of passenger movements has been calculated using winter numbers only and which were gathered before the traffic-free route to the station was completed

At Castle Semple, numbers of visits are increasing year on year, from just under 67,000 in 2003 to just over 83,000 in 2005. Six visitor surveys have been undertaken for Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park since 1991. A brief summary of the most recent survey findings (2004) reveals that:

- ◆ The Park as a whole receives around 1.5 million visitors each year;
- ◆ Over 60% of visitors to Castle Semple are from Renfrewshire, and a further 15% are from Glasgow. This is a very local audience;
- ◆ One in six visitors to Castle Semple are first time visitors, whereas around one in five visit every day or two to three times a week;
- ◆ Around one in six respondents felt that signage to and in the Park was an issue;
- ◆ The three main likes across the whole Park were scenery, accessibility and low level walks; the main dislikes were car parks and dog dirt, particularly at Castle Semple;
- ◆ Over 80% of respondents felt that facilities at Castle Semple were either good or very good, but felt that other Park centres were better at providing information;
- ◆ 90% of respondents thought that toilets and free parking were essential at the Park centres and 61% thought a café was essential, especially at Castle Semple. 41% thought gifts were also essential at Castle Semple;
- ◆ The main reasons cited for visiting the Park were for a family outing (28%), for low level walks (16%) and for refreshments (11%); for Castle Semple, the main reasons were family outings (25%), refreshments (18%) and cycling (13%);
- ◆ Given the high level of local and repeat visits, it is not entirely surprising that no respondents cited that they had found out about the Park from its website.

In the last year for which there are complete figures, over 300 ranger-days were used within Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park to deliver environmental education programmes to nearly 8,000 school pupils. 2000 pupils attended safety programmes at Castle Semple. The other water and land based training programmes, including bespoke courses, provided for over 6,000 people, almost all based at or from Castle Semple Centre.

Visitor profiles

When we begin to look at the different elements of the study area, it is clear that some audience groups are attracted specifically to certain parts of it, such as young people coming for watersports, while others may explore more widely – or can at least be encouraged to do so in the future.

Existing visitors can be segmented (but not exclusively) by type of visit and profile. Of those listed below, categories 1 to 5 could be defined as forming the principal market for the study area. Within these generic categories, of course, there are many with very specific interests, a lot of whom are identified below by their activity, and who form – in the majority of cases – secondary markets.

<i>Type of visit</i>	<i>Profile</i>
1 Local people	◆ Children
2 Day visitors local regional	◆ Teenagers and young adults ◆ Adults ◆ Older people
3 Tourists regional national international	◆ People with disabilities / special needs These might visit as:
4 Club visitors	◆ Individuals
5 Educational visitors	◆ Couples
6 Work visitors	◆ Families
7 Virtual visitors	◆ Groups

Visitors and users can also be differentiated by their activity. Activities also begin to draw out the main audience groups using different parts of the study area, and enable us to link activity, site element, type of visit and profile – as shown in the following summary table. The numbers in the *Type of visit* column refer to the groups identified in the table above.

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Site element</i>	<i>Type of visit</i>	<i>Profile</i>
Artists, amateur photographers etc	Potentially all	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Adults, young adults
Café users	Castle Semple VC, village	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Mix of all; repeat visitors
Cyclists (leisure)	Cycle paths, roads, village	1, 2, 3	Children, young adults, adults, older people; repeat visitors
Cyclists (commuting)	Cycle paths, roads, village	1	Adults
Dog walkers	Potentially all	1, 2	Mix of all; regular repeat users
Event goers	Potentially all	1, 2, 3	Mix of all
Historians / researchers	Potentially all	6, 7	Adults
Horse riders	Bridleways, roads	1, 2	Children, young adults, adults
Play / picnic	Castle Semple VC environs, lochside	1, 2	Children, families; regular repeat visitors
Schools / education visits	Potentially all	6, 7	Children, groups
Shop users	Castle Semple VC, RSPB reserve, village	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Mix of all
Sightseers	Lochside, village	2, 3	Mix of all

Special interest ¹⁰ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Archaeology ◆ Architecture ◆ Birdwatching ◆ Fishing ◆ Genealogy ◆ Geology ◆ Industrial heritage ◆ Landscape design ◆ Local history ◆ Watersports ◆ Wildlife watching 	Potentially all	Mix of all	Mix of all
Special needs visits	Castle Semple VC, RSPB reserve	I, 2	People with disabilities, young families, older people
Students and adult learners	Potentially all	I, 2, 4, 6	Young adults, adults, older people, people with disabilities
Walkers	Potentially all	I, 2, 3	Mix of all; regular visitors
Workers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Coach drivers ◆ Contractors ◆ Delivery drivers ◆ Event organisers ◆ Event participants ◆ Rangers / wardens ◆ Service providers e.g. bike hire ◆ Shop / café staff ◆ Teachers ◆ Volunteers ◆ Watersports staff 	Potentially all	I, 7	Adults, individuals

In reality, there will be a greater degree of crossover between activity and profile; for example, a small proportion of work visits may be made by young adults or people with disabilities, or be made in groups. The above table only highlights the core user profiles for each activity.

In addition, there is also a considerable audience that come to Castle Semple to do little more than enjoy the scenery passively, at most. This is a challenging audience to engage with using interpretation, but we believe that our proposals (later in the report) for eye-catching lookout points and intriguing clues will encourage them to

¹⁰ This includes general visitors with a special interest as well as those belonging to specific clubs and organisations, such as the RSPB and watersports clubs

move on from ‘doing nothing’ to beginning to discover the wider attraction of the site. As we say below in relation to under-represented groups, there may be dangers in undue focus on those who come to be undisturbed – it’s a traditional pastime!

It is also important to note that the nature of facilities at Castle Semple Centre attract a loyal local audience, many of whom are time-rich but not necessarily financially affluent. This audience – made up of individuals, families and formal and informal groups of all ages and abilities – values the Centre because it offers affordable refreshments and gifts, there is no charge for making use of the general facilities and visitors can even bring their own food into the café. Any developments at the Centre will need to consider these regular repeat visitors and ensure that their needs continue to be met; there is the risk of alienating this group through the provision of features and facilities designed to attract other audience groups.

This short assessment reveals that a very wide range of users, of different ages, abilities and interests, is making use of some or all of Lochwinnoch and its environs. The key to future success will lie in engaging visitors and users and encouraging them to stay longer, explore more widely and find out more about the area.

Under-represented audiences

When reviewing audiences for a site and exploring its potential for development, it is important to consider those audiences that are currently not making use of its features and facilities. What is interesting at Castle Semple and Lochwinnoch is that the area offers opportunities for most of the traditionally under-represented groups:

<i>Traditionally under-represented groups at countryside and natural heritage sites¹¹</i>	<i>Current / potential situation</i>
Very young children and their families	Attracted to the lochside for picnics and feeding the ducks; potential to increase appeal across the wider site
Teenagers and young adults	Addressed through watersports, cycling and other activity provision around the Loch; also through volunteering and work experience opportunities
Women	Addressed in part by provision of family-friendly activities and facilities and events
Ethnic minorities	Potential due to proximity to Glasgow and Paisley
Urban dwellers	Addressed through proximity to above centres of population
Low income / unemployed	Addressed largely by provision of free facilities and ease of access
People with disabilities	Addressed through provision at both visitor centres and all-ability trails
People without cars	Addressed due to location and good transport links; enhanced by development of cycling and walking trails

¹¹ PLB Consulting Ltd (2001): *Developing New Audiences for the Heritage - Research Study for the Heritage Lottery Fund*. Available on line at <http://www.hlf.org.uk>

Consequently, it seems advisable to avoid focusing unduly on the traditionally under-represented groups at the expense of the core audiences. The core audiences of local people, day visitors, groups and schools are likely to continue to be the main audiences and new features and facilities will attract these in greater numbers.

However, other natural heritage sites, such as Loch Lomond, are successful at attracting ethnic minority groups to enjoy its facilities. We therefore **recommend** that the team builds upon work done to date by RSPB with the Black Environment Network, and explores opportunities with BEN for developing facilities or activities that would attract this audience to Lochwinnoch in greater numbers.

By far the greatest proportion of visitors to the various facilities in and around Lochwinnoch appears to comprise local people and day visitors. To date, Castle Semple Loch is a local and regional attraction – particularly given that its immediate catchment area includes both Paisley and Glasgow – and is not really on the tourist radar. Therefore there is potential to extend its appeal to tourists from the UK and overseas through the development of high quality interpretation to complement the walks, cycleways and other facilities around the Loch – providing this is supported by effective marketing and a good web presence.

Barriers to access

A series of real or perceived barriers to visitors within the study area include:

- ◆ There is limited encouragement to go beyond either of the visitor centres – nothing to ‘aim’ for on foot or by bike.
- ◆ The car parks can be very busy or full (and both would benefit from upgrading).
- ◆ Lochwinnoch Station’s southbound platform is not accessible to wheelchair users; pushchair users need to carry them up the steps.
- ◆ Train services, although at hourly intervals are regarded as good on a national scale for a rural area, are not frequent enough to encourage heavy leisure use.
- ◆ Bus services from and to Glasgow and other main origins / destinations also reflect the relatively rural nature of Lochwinnoch’s location.
- ◆ Many visitors to the RSPB Nature Reserve don’t seem to go to the Castle Semple Centre and vice versa.
- ◆ Some people do not realise that the Castle Semple Centre and RSPB Visitor Centre are different sites, or arrive at one when looking for the other.
- ◆ Some people feel that RSPB sites are only for members and/or experts.
- ◆ Some people feel that RSPB sites are not very family friendly.
- ◆ There are no bike racks at the Castle Semple Centre.
- ◆ First-time visitors may be put off by the ‘clubhouse’ feel of the Castle Semple Centre.
- ◆ Some visitors are unaware of walking and cycling routes from the Castle Semple Centre.
- ◆ There is very little interpretation of the historic and natural features once away from either visitor centre.
- ◆ There are few physical or interpretive links between Loch and village and there is little encouragement to explore Lochwinnoch from either visitor centre.

- ◆ Options for horseriders are limited in the study area.
- ◆ There is very little interpretation of what can be seen in Lochwinnoch village.
- ◆ The Castle Semple Centre shop does not offer many site-specific items.
- ◆ The observation tower at RSPB is not fully accessible.
- ◆ The road is a physical and intellectual barrier between Castle Semple and Barr Lochs.
- ◆ There is no interpretation along the trails or at the RSPB hides to help non-specialist visitors.
- ◆ There is no leaflet or guidebook to the whole Castle Semple estate, to encourage visitors to understand the wider site or explore all its highlights.
- ◆ There is little evidence on site of the partnership between Castle Semple Centre and the RSPB Nature Reserve, to encourage visitors to enjoy both on a single visit.
- ◆ Signage is confusing and unhelpful as well as visually intrusive.
- ◆ Most interpretive panels inside the visitor centres and across the village and wider landscape are tired, outdated and do not reflect the partnership work in progress.
- ◆ Some of the historic and natural highlights of the study area are difficult to reach for some visitors, and will continue to be so even once the footpath is complete eg Kenmure Hill, Parkhill Woods maze and viewpoint.
- ◆ Some antisocial behaviour takes place at points around the site and evidence of this can be seen, which can be off-putting for visitors and local people alike.

We provide general guidance on access and accessibility in Appendix B.

6 Interpretive approach

In developing our approach, challenges which need to be faced include:

The project area

- ◆ the site has such a variety of features and attractions that no single feature (other than Loch) or characteristic is pre-eminent, other than the sheer range of activities in the area;
- ◆ there is multiple ownership of land and many local interests who need to be consulted on interpretive approaches or assured that these represent no 'threats';
- ◆ the existing heavy use particularly of the Castle Semple car park and Visitor Centre at many times of the week and the year;
- ◆ the nature of the complete round-Loch route which will be usable by fit walkers only, if present plans are pursued;
- ◆ the diversion of the former footpath to avoid homes in the area of the former Castle Semple, thereby losing the 'lochside' appeal;
- ◆ the lack of perceived easy access between the Loch and Lochwinnoch;
- ◆ confused and poor existing signposting, confused routes;
- ◆ Howwood seems 'off-site' although already linked by the former carriage road to Castle Semple and the village's recent Paths Initiative.

The market

- ◆ the markets for different facilities in the study appear to be largely divided by prime purpose of visiting, eg:
 - ◆ to find out about or enjoy the birds (at the RSPB reserve);
 - ◆ to enjoy the recreation facilities at Castle Semple Loch;
 - ◆ to go for gentle walks and strolls;
 - ◆ to go for longer walks, cycle rides;
- ◆ limited information from visitor surveys on visitors' likes and dislikes;
- ◆ most visitors are, and are likely to remain, repeat visitors;
- ◆ most visitors come to do something, including 'nothing';
- ◆ few visitors appear to use such interpretation as exists except when attending walks and talks etc.

Our goals

In order to meet these challenges, our overall goals include:

- ◆ creating a unified approach to projecting and presenting the study area, in effect providing the basis for a 'branding' to ensure maximum impact;
- ◆ encompassing signposting, orientation, information and interpretation as integrated 'visitor guidance';
- ◆ creating visual and thematic links between the Loch area, Lochwinnoch and Howwood;
- ◆ relying principally on visual icons including symbols, shapes, structures; using colours and a visual interpretive framework;
- ◆ using no more than three key themes to underpin all interpretation and linking themes within interpretation;
- ◆ selecting relatively few, distinctive 'lookout' points to concentrate story-telling;
- ◆ concentrating other 'traditional' static interpretation to limited locations on site, and introducing creative prose, poetry, contemplative text etc in association with wayside 'furniture' and installations;
- ◆ minimising the use of extended text except in selected print / websites etc;
- ◆ maximising the use of flexible / 'updatable' / seasonal interpretation;
- ◆ developing the important role of staff and volunteers in providing interpretation;
- ◆ developing the existing events programmes and introducing interpretation into other activities;
- ◆ offering a phased programme of implementation to ensure a changing experience for repeat visitors.

Interpretation is never a panacea in itself; it is an important part of wider resource and visitor management responsibilities and must be planned and implemented as such. It should not be regarded as a 'bolt-on' extra or a discrete element of work. As part of this, interpretation, the provision of information and other facilities, and marketing must all work to similar goals, using the same approach and themes and, of course, reflecting the same 'branding'.

7 Aims and interpretive objectives

In order to guide the development of interpretation, we propose that the following aims be adopted, based upon those in the brief and those that arise from the foregoing pages. These aims, which are partly managerial, partly promotional and partly interpretive, are that visitors¹² will:

- ◆ perceive the study area as a single destination with multiple choices of pursuit for active and passive leisure and enjoyment;
- ◆ discover, and want to find out more about, the area's many different aspects of natural and cultural heritage;
- ◆ use the ease of local access to visit, or come back to visit, more than one sub-destination, eg the RSPB reserve *and* Castle Semple Centre, Castle Semple Loch *and* Lochwinnoch, Lochwinnoch *and* the lochside paths.

To support the aims, we have drawn up a series of interpretive objectives and have divided these into four categories. We have added to the 'conventional' three a fourth which is largely related to visitor and resource management, using interpretation to encourage or discourage visitors from going in particular directions either permanently or at specific times. The proposed objectives are that:

Those linked to discovery ('learning')

Visitors will:

- ◆ leave the study area knowing more about one or more aspects of its natural and cultural history and the inter-relationships between them;
- ◆ realise that the area's heritage has many fascinating – and inter-related – facets;
- ◆ recognise the significance of the area in terms of its wildlife and, particularly, its bird populations;
- ◆ enjoy and want to discover more about Lochwinnoch village and its environs including the links with Howwood village;
- ◆ contribute information, where they are able to, about the area;
- ◆ take part in more guided walks and other interpretive events, whether or not allied to specific pursuits.

Those linked to feeling ('emotional')

Visitors will:

- ◆ develop, or increase, a sense of 'belonging' to the area, whether locals or not;
- ◆ want to support the conservation and managerial aims of the organisations that are responsible for the area;
- ◆ recommend the area to friends and relatives as an outstanding destination with a range of attractions.

Those linked to actions ('behavioural')

¹² As we noted earlier, we use the term 'visitors' throughout this report as a generic term to denote all users of the study area, including local people, day visitors, tourists, staff, volunteers and so on

Visitors will:

- ◆ stay longer and/or return to find out more about the area in addition to coming for general and specific enjoyment;
- ◆ widen the purposes of their visits to encompass more of the area's facilities;
- ◆ act with even greater responsibility and seek to 'protect' the area.

Those linked to place ('locational')

Visitors will:

- ◆ accept guidance to visit areas that are more robust and therefore less sensitive for reasons of conservation, privacy etc;
- ◆ accept guidance about not visiting highly sensitive areas (eg the Dubbs Water Trail) at all or at specific times.

8 Interpretive and marketing themes

In order to provide a firm basis for interpretation, we propose the following overarching theme and four supporting themes. These themes will not necessarily be apparent to visitors in the form below but will guide those responsible for devising and implementing interpretation and marketing. They are:

Overarching theme – The influence of water

- ◆ The one constant in the long story of the Lochwinnoch area is the ubiquitous presence of water, its essential role in all life and its potential to create change (both positively and negatively), and its use by people for practical, aesthetic and pleasurable purposes and by flora and fauna as a permanent or temporary home over the centuries. 'The influence of water' theme is not intended for use with the public except as the underlying, guiding theme. In terms of a strapline or slogan, 'water pleasure' could be a possible choice and we suggest this in later sections.

Key themes – heritage, wildlife, people, activities

- ◆ The Lochwinnoch area, with its lochs, nature reserve, countryside and communities, has an outstanding natural and cultural heritage which has been worked and adapted over the years and can now be enjoyed through a range of active and passive leisure pursuits – *an ever-changing place*.
- ◆ Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve and Castle Semple Loch, with their surrounding wetlands, meadows and woodland, are home to a variety of plants and wildlife throughout the year – *a place to explore*.
- ◆ Lochwinnoch and the lands of the former Castle Semple Estate have a long and fascinating agricultural, industrial and social history – *a place to discover*.
- ◆ The Lochwinnoch area, with its communities and countryside, provides for many leisure activities and opportunities to discover more – *a place to enjoy*.

In addition, it will be possible to devise sub-themes related to specific topics to ensure that all interpretation serves the chosen thematic route. These sub-themes could include:

- ◆ wintering birds, wetland plants, moths and butterflies;

- ◆ water management, past and present, flood prevention;
- ◆ the Semple family;
- ◆ farming and land management;
- ◆ sports and pastimes (former curling tournaments, fishing, shooting, gardening, cycling, sailing etc);
- ◆ local skills and industry (furniture making, weaving, arts and crafts etc)
- ◆ living off the land (fishponds, the ice house, the walled garden, deer, crops etc)

Wherever possible, the inter-relationships between themes should be demonstrated in all interpretation.

A holistic approach

One of the challenges in devising the Interpretive Masterplan is the difficulty in finding one name or description for the study area. It is a heterogeneous assemblage of locations and attractions including the lochs, a nature reserve, a water-sports facility, informal leisure paths and routes, two villages and open countryside.

It is essential to draw them together without losing the sense of variety which is, arguably, its greatest strength. In this case, it might be said, the separate parts are greater than the whole for many visitors. We therefore considered alternative approaches, the first based upon the prime destination of Castle Semple Loch, the second on the area based upon Lochwinnoch as the principal local community.

The first would use the device of describing everything as:

@ Castle Semple Loch

and the second would, in the same way, use the device of describing everything as:

@Lochwinnoch

The adoption of the email address format is not uncommon and has been used with great success by @Bristol (as in Explore@Bristol, Wildwalk@Bristol etc). It is not yet an overused device and has the advantage of being wholly understandable to all but a tiny proportion of the population. While it is 'trendy' at present, it is likely to become a normal and acceptable descriptive device in coming years.

@ Lochwinnoch

@Lochwinnoch would provide a marketing, promotional and site signage 'umbrella' that signified a unified, if not a single, destination and would lead to identifying, for example:

- ◆ RSPB Nature Reserve
@Lochwinnoch;
- ◆ Castle Semple Loch
@Lochwinnoch;
- ◆ Barr Loch
@Lochwinnoch;
- ◆ Watersports and fun
@Lochwinnoch;

- ◆ Cycling and walking
@Lochwinnoch;
- ◆ A day of discovery
@Lochwinnoch.

Although Castle Semple Loch – as a body of water – could be seen as the primary destination and is the physical location of the RSPB Nature Reserve, the reserve is currently titled ‘Lochwinnoch’. Road signs show Lochwinnoch as the local destination, the railway station is named Lochwinnoch and the village is a bus service destination. Insofar as either name is known beyond the region, Lochwinnoch is more evident on maps. We **recommend**, therefore, that Lochwinnoch be used as the principal destination identifier in all signposting, marketing and publicity.

A generic motif

There may be a case for developing a logo or emblem to link the constituent parts of the study area. Given that the Loch (including the Nature Reserve) is its most obvious feature, we suggest that a swan might be used as a generic motif (as it is on the RSPB leaflet, in local paintings etc). The swan is the most ubiquitous of the birds on the Loch, immediately recognisable and, although used elsewhere, perfectly justifiable as a symbol for @Lochwinnoch.

However, there is a strong case for not trying to introduce yet another motif to a public increasingly expected to recognise and remember everything from the obvious to the abstruse. Using @Lochwinnoch itself, therefore, as the motif could be the most effective way of establishing the unity of site with a simple, accurate and familiar name simply ‘tweaked’ by the addition of the @ symbol.

A design guide

The power of a symbol to unify an area in the minds of local people and visitors can be realised only if it is used consistently on all recreation facilities and communications, such as buildings, signs and leaflets. We **recommend** that a design guide be produced to promote this coherent use by all organisations with a local recreation / visitor facility remit. The guide will specify how the symbol should be applied to a range of media and in a variety of situations, both on its own and in conjunction with other organisational logos.

9 Interpretive media

In this chapter, we make recommendations for a ‘suite’ of interpretive and related media for the study area.

It is important to note that this list provides a set of aspirations towards which to work and forms a framework for incremental development. Taken together, our proposals comprise a long term vision for Lochwinnoch and achieving this vision will be entirely dependent upon a number of factors. These include the need to secure appropriate funds, and the assumption that all the proposals can be

implemented without adverse impact upon the landscape, wildlife, historic fabric and local communities, and within the resources of the site's staff and volunteers for implementation, management and maintenance.

A vision such as this, when supported by all those involved in the management and maintenance of the study area and the communities who live there, will ensure a high quality experience over the coming years, where funds are effectively allocated and resources carefully targeted. Remaining focused on the framework presented here will avoid a piecemeal approach to developments in the future.

Some of the following elements are proposed for specific locations (where identified) or are generic. Some link directly with those relating to infrastructure in the previous chapter. The proposals cover:

- ◆ arrival and visitor welcome;
- ◆ interpretive material in:
 - ◆ RSPB Visitor Centre;
 - ◆ Castle Semple Centre;
- ◆ interpretive 'lookootheries' as destination points;
- ◆ interpretive panels in:
 - ◆ Lochwinnoch Station;
 - ◆ Castle Semple Car Park;
 - ◆ RSPB Nature Reserve Car Park
 - ◆ within the 'lookootheries';
 - ◆ Lochwinnoch;
- ◆ interpretive 'clues';
- ◆ interpretive sculptures;
- ◆ interpretive publications:
 - ◆ leaflet(s);
 - ◆ guidebook;
 - ◆ postcards;
 - ◆ websites
 - ◆ interpretation manual;
- ◆ interpretive tours:
 - ◆ audio / MP3 / mobile phone tours;
 - ◆ 'swandola' boat trips;
 - ◆ guided tours.

Interpretive centres

We understand that longer term plans for the RSPB Visitor Centre could see it re-located to a site close to Barr Loch, on the south side of the A760. This would provide RSPB with a modern interpretive and visitor services resource that could incorporate facilities for interpretation that matched the highest standards, using a range of media from simple graphics to sophisticated electronics.

The RSPB 'vision' for the Barr Loch has been summarised by them as follows:

- ◆ The Barr Loch will become a biodiversity hotspot and amazing wildlife spectacle, providing habitats for large numbers of breeding, migrant and wintering waterfowl. Situated a stone's throw from Scotland's urbanised central belt, Barr Loch will be a popular wildlife tourism attraction that will be accessible to all and within easy reach of over 2 million people.
- ◆ The qualifying features of the Castle Semple and Barr Loch SSSI will be safeguarded and enhanced.
- ◆ The overall biodiversity value of the site will be increased considerably and the project will make a significant contribution to the aims of the Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde Local Biodiversity Action Plan and Scottish Biodiversity Strategy targets.
- ◆ Water quality will be enhanced and flood storage capacity maintained or enhanced.

This vision would provide an opportunity to enhance the interpretive role of a new visitor centre for an even wider audience than is currently attracted.

An alternative 'blue sky' scenario could result in combining the RSPB and Castle Semple Centres in one location. The success of this approach would depend to a considerable degree on where the new facility was located but, in terms of shared overheads, it makes a lot of sense. Such a visitor centre would have the same opportunities to use contemporary interpretive techniques in the same way as a new RSPB centre would.

However, finding a single location that meets all needs could be difficult and, at this stage, we would suggest that it would be more effective to maintain two centres. The existing Castle Semple Centre should concentrate on three key markets:

- ◆ those (from the surrounding sub-region) taking part in water recreation whether under tuition, as part of club activities or individually;
- ◆ local people for whom the present centre fulfils an important social function very often on a regular and even frequent basis;
- ◆ visitors from all parts with a general interest in the area, in the natural and cultural environment, in quiet recreation or simply taking a break.

The RSPB centre, whether in its current or in a new location, would concentrate on its three key markets:

- ◆ local people and visitors from all parts with a specific interest in birds and their habitats, and in the Lochwinnoch Reserve in particular;
- ◆ visitors from all parts with a passing interest in birds, other wildlife and the wider natural (and cultural) environment together with a wish for quiet recreation;
- ◆ children, including schoolchildren.

The privately owned Barr Castle may be opened to the public at some point in the future and, as such, may form another focal point for visitors coming to the area. This would be a valuable addition to the portfolio of attractions around Lochwinnoch (and would perhaps fulfil the expectations of those anticipating a castle at Castle Semple); however this is an idea that has only recently been mooted and is likely to be a long term initiative.

We therefore **recommend** that, for the foreseeable future, the Masterplan allows for the operation of both the existing visitor centres with more limited interpretation in the Castle Semple Centre (but more on the path network beyond it, with a particular focus on the historic estate and what can be seen there today), and with more extensive interpretation in the RSPB Visitor Centre presenting birds, other wildlife and the natural environment in their historical / cultural context.

Arrival and welcome

We strongly believe that enhancing the signage and welcome, and upgrading the interpretation at both visitor centres is likely to benefit all users and will add to their enjoyment and insight. In particular, this approach is also likely to reassure first time visitors, helping to orientate them and make them feel included in the experience.

At the Castle Semple Centre we **recommend** the commissioning of a landscape design practice to formulate a comprehensive landscape design plan for the Centre's external environments. The plan should provide a high quality landscape setting for the centre, rationalise and expand car parking, create an appropriate degree of separation between passive leisure pursuits and group activities, and screen the watersports equipment compound from the leisure orientated areas. In addition, a specialist sign planner and designer should be commissioned to rationalise and raise the quality of signage across the site, within the context of an overall sign plan for the area.

We also **recommend** the commissioning of a landscape design practice to redesign the immediate external environments of the RSPB Centre. The design should provide a high quality landscape setting for the centre, rationalise, improve and expand car parking, and provide better access to the building for goods vehicles.

Interpretive displays

Castle Semple Centre

At this stage, we make only general proposals for interpretive displays in the Castle Semple Centre where the limited existing interpretation is in need of replacing. New interpretation must take account of the principal (and secondary) markets referred to in the section of visitor profiles in Chapter 5, relatively few of whom are using the Centre to 'learn'. This should not preclude every opportunity being taken to encourage visitors to find out, however¹³.

As in the RSPB Visitor Centre, children require targeted interpretation as well as specific information related to their curriculum if they are on school visits.

Initially we **recommend** that an architect or interior designer be commissioned to help rationalise and separate different types of use within the Centre building, and to create high quality spaces appropriate for the required uses and audiences

¹³ There is a very important minority of visitors for whom learning is the key motivation for visiting, either self-inspired in the case of water sports and similar activities or guided by others in the case of educational visits by schools and similar institutions. They are also a potential target for interpretation related to their activities.

including flexible spaces for exhibitions and classroom activities. Interpretation should be integrated within viewing facilities and the café area.

We **recommend** that the Centre provides the following:

- ◆ introductory interpretation to set Castle Semple Loch in the context of its natural and historical environment – developing the ‘water ways’ theme;
- ◆ introductory interpretation about the most visible and / or important bird / animal / insect etc species on the Loch (and Reserve) – principally in graphic form on table tops, napkins, menus, window ‘engravings’ etc;
- ◆ introductory interpretation about the important historical and cultural features which can be visited on the paths network – principally in graphic form on table tops, napkins, menus, paper bags etc;
- ◆ introductory orientation / information / interpretation to allow a meaningful visit to the project area including Lochwinnoch and Howwood – in printed form; this should be a joint leaflet with the one proposed below for the RSPB Visitor Centre;
- ◆ specific interpretation about flora and fauna, local history etc in digital form;
- ◆ curriculum-related information / interpretation in both printed and digital form;
- ◆ external interpretation only within the proposed lookootheries and as part of the ‘interpretive clues’ and sculptures programme of installations (see below)
- ◆ an ongoing programme of events and activities as described below.

We **recommend** that introductory interpretation is located near the entrance to the Centre, that digital interpretation is available via one or two terminals in the café area (potentially including opportunities to download interpretive tours via MP3 as described below) and that interpretation aimed at children is incorporated within the ‘immersion’ interpretation on table tops etc.

We would expect the Centre to include within its range of products on sale more items that have a relevance to the project area and to ensure that these include publications (in whatever form) relating to the area where these are available. We recognise the limited market for these but suggest that providing appropriate space for them is part of the wider SRANI project objectives.

RSPB Visitor Centre and Reserve

We believe that the interior of the building would benefit from comprehensive re-planning with the requirements of modern leisure visitors in mind. In particular, the central ground floor space is relatively poor for bird watching but would, in combination with the classroom, make a very attractive café with a superb view of the loch. Flexible partitioning would allow a section to be used as a classroom when required.

In this scenario, bird viewing equipment and interpretation would still feature on the ground floor, the only fully accessible space. However, the tower would become the main bird viewing area for the majority of visitors. The existing interpretation on the ground floor and in the tower would require complete replacement.

We **recommend** that an architect or space planner be commissioned to redesign the building interior to capitalise fully on the available opportunities to cater for the

modern requirements of leisure visitors, birders and staff and to integrate interpretation within viewing facilities and the café area, in addition to providing flexible spaces for exhibitions and classroom activities.

At this stage, we make only general proposals for interpretive displays in the Centre, as the existing interpretation is much in need of updating in a number of areas. New interpretation must consider the principal (and secondary) markets while recognising that experienced 'birders' will seek only detailed local information (eg sightings, breeding statistics) which can be made available digitally. Those with a passing interest will need more general background material as well as encouragement to use data bases (and to visit the Reserve itself). Children require targeted interpretation as well as specific information related to their curriculum if they are on school visits.

We **recommend** that the Centre and the Reserve provide the following:

- ◆ introductory interpretation to set the Reserve in the context of its natural and historical environment – developing the 'water ways' theme;
- ◆ introductory interpretation about the most visible and / or important bird species on the Reserve – principally in graphic form;
- ◆ specific interpretation about individual bird species, principally in digital form;
- ◆ specific interpretation about habitats, flora and other fauna, and the interaction with birds – principally in digital form;
- ◆ introductory orientation / information / interpretation to allow a meaningful visit to the Reserve – in printed form; this should be a joint leaflet with the one proposed below for the Castle Semple Centre / Lochwinnoch / Howwood area;
- ◆ curriculum-related information / interpretation in both printed and digital form for schools and other groups;
- ◆ external interpretation only within the proposed lookootheries and as part of the 'interpretive clues' and sculptures programme along the paths and trails;
- ◆ an ongoing programme of events and activities in conjunction with Castle Semple Centre and the two villages, to include guided walks, talks, taster sessions, arts, crafts and performance.

We **recommend** that introductory interpretation is located near the entrance to the Visitor Centre, that digital interpretation is available both on the ground floor and in the viewing tower and that interpretation aimed at children is located in the viewing tower (as at present) with 'virtual' replication available on the ground floor.

We also **recommend** that the lookootherie (see below) proposed to replace the former hide on the Dubbs Water Trail is in effect a family-friendly hide. We note the need identified in the recent Quality Assurance feedback at the Reserve for family-friendly facilities and propose that this would be an appropriate place to encourage children and families to engage with the wildlife without impacting adversely on more 'serious' birdwatchers and naturalists making use of the Reserve.

We would expect the Visitor Centre to maintain its range of products and to ensure that these include available publications (in whatever form) relating to the area.

Interpretive ‘lookooteries’

We **recommend** that appropriate consultants be commissioned to design a series of unique, appealing and multi-purpose outdoor lookout points, or ‘lookooteries’ for installation at key focal-points. The design should be different for all or most sites so as to respect its individual sense of place and to provide a welcome addition to the micro-environment. However, the structures should share common design elements,¹⁴ and information symbol, in order to build recognition and maintain consistency throughout the area. The design should allow for use at different times of year, perhaps using interchangeable (interpretive) panels that provided more or less shelter, depending on the season of use.



Each would provide:

- ◆ shelter;
- ◆ seating;
- ◆ space for a wheelchairs or buggy;
- ◆ views of one or more parts of the area;
- ◆ orientation / maps of path network;
- ◆ limited interpretation using seasonally-replaceable panels.

We **recommend** that lookouts be considered for some or all of the following locations:

- ◆ Castle Semple Centre – an orientation and information point available to visitors when the Centre is closed as well as a viewpoint for the Loch;
- ◆ Phase 2 path viewpoint – a lookout platform close to the Loch on the final section of the new path between the two visitor centres and near the sewage works;
- ◆ Dubbs Water Trail – a striking replacement for the former bird-watching hide;
- ◆ at the end of the path through the RSPB reserve at its north east corner;
- ◆ Courtshaw Hill – a sheltered viewpoint lookout with panoramic views of the Loch;
- ◆ Blackditch Bay – a platform in the water providing a worthwhile destination point for path-users;

¹⁴ The issues of vandalism and inappropriate use need to be considered during the design and development of these structures. Roofing them may exacerbate such problems and therefore an alternative approach may be required to establish consistency of design amongst the structures.

- ◆ River Cart New Bridge – a waterside platform at the new bridging point over the river, possibly designed as part of the bridge structure and linking to Howwood;
- ◆ Lochwinnoch village centre – providing a high quality addition to The Cross, (perhaps mimicking the shape of the ‘missing’ corner) and providing a much needed public focal point for the village.
- ◆ Johnshill Field – a lookout point with a view over the village and the Loch.

We have considered locating a ‘lookootherie’ within Howwood village, at the Triangle. However, there is already an attractive sitting area, with a specially-designed curved seat and an information panel. Any lookootherie would compete with these structures but could be designed to integrate with the seating area and incorporate information and interpretation at a later stage.

‘Fixed’ interpretive media

Lochwinnoch Station

We **recommend** that an information-oriented graphic panel should be placed at Lochwinnoch Station in the car park, to be immediately obvious to all users. It should include a combination of:

- ◆ introduction – a heading and strapline even as simple as *@Lochwinnoch – water pleasure* to set the scene;
- ◆ orientation – a simple bird’s eye plan / map of the project area with key destinations and features marked, supported by such additional directions as may be necessary;
- ◆ information – factual statements about facilities – the RSPB Nature Reserve, Castle Semple Loch and Lochwinnoch, walking and cycling routes etc;
- ◆ interpretation – a sentence (or two at most) explaining the heading and strapline in terms of the appeal and interest of the area and why it is worth exploring.

Castle Semple Car Park

Should the Castle Semple Centre lookootherie be located anywhere other than in front of the building, we **recommend** that an information-oriented panel also be placed in a prominent location in the Castle Semple Centre car park, to ensure that as many visitors as possible see this information. It should include a combination of:

- ◆ introduction – a heading and strapline such as *Castle Semple Loch @Lochwinnoch – water pleasure* to set the scene;
- ◆ orientation – a simple bird’s eye plan / map of the project area with key destinations and features marked, supported by such additional directions as may be necessary, particularly in relation to Castle Semple Loch itself;
- ◆ information – factual statements about facilities – Castle Semple Loch and its Centre, Lochwinnoch, the RSPB Nature Reserve, walking and cycling routes, water recreation, equipment hire etc;
- ◆ interpretation – a sentence (or two at most) explaining the heading and strapline in terms of the appeal and interest of the area and why it is worth exploring.

RSPB Nature Reserve Car Park

We **recommend** that a similar information-oriented panel be placed in the RSPB Nature Reserve Visitor Centre car park, located to ensure that as many visitors as possible see it. It should include a combination of:

- ◆ introduction – a heading and strapline such as *RSPB Nature Reserve @Lochwinnoch – water pleasure* to set the scene;
- ◆ orientation – a simple bird’s eye plan / map of the project area with key destinations and features marked, supported by such additional directions as may be necessary, particularly in relation to the Nature Reserve itself;
- ◆ information – factual statements about facilities – the RSPB Nature Reserve, Castle Semple Loch and its Centre, Lochwinnoch, walking and cycling routes, bird observation, optical equipment hire etc;
- ◆ interpretation – a sentence (or two at most) explaining the heading and strapline in terms of the appeal and interest of the area and why it’s worth exploring.

Howwood

We **recommend** that a similar information-oriented panel be considered for placing in Howwood, possibly in conjunction with the existing walks panel (although this will not be necessary if a lookooterie is constructed at a later stage at the Triangle). The panel should include a combination of:

- ◆ introduction – a heading and strapline such as *Howwood and Lochwinnoch – water pleasure* to set the scene;
- ◆ orientation – a simple bird’s eye plan / map of the project area with key destinations and features marked, supported by such additional directions as may be necessary, particularly in relation to Howwood village itself;
- ◆ information – factual statements about facilities – bus and rail routes, Castle Semple Loch and its Centre, the RSPB Nature Reserve, walking and cycling routes, water recreation, equipment hire etc;
- ◆ interpretation – a sentence (or two at most) explaining the heading and strapline in terms of the appeal and interest of the area – and village in particular – and why they are worth exploring.

Within the ‘lookooteries’

We **recommend** that the interpretive content of each of the Lookooteries should be designed specifically for its location, although there should be some interpretation in common in order to present a cohesive story across the whole project area. The style of presentation should also follow a consistent approach but without compromising the individuality of each lookooterie.

The content of the interpretation should include:

- ◆ introduction – a brief explanation of the *water pleasure* theme and why the project area is significant;
- ◆ orientation – a simple ‘repeater’ bird’s eye plan / map of the project area with key destinations and features marked so that visitors can see where they are in relation to the whole area;

- ◆ information – brief factual statements about facilities available which visitors may not have realised are easily accessible;
- ◆ interpretation – a series of short introductions to, and explanations of, the features of particular significance around, or seen from, the lookooterie.

Interpretive ‘clues’

We **recommend** that appropriate writers and designers be commissioned to design a series of sculptural interpretive ‘clues’ for installation at a variety of locations where interesting cultural or environmental stories are manifest.

The clues should consist of a very short piece of prose or poetry supported by a simple illustration. The clues should give visitors a tantalising hint about the meaning of a particular feature by engaging their intellect and tickling their curiosity, rather than providing the full story. A more complete ‘answer’ to the clue should be made available on the ‘lookooterie’ interpretive panels or in the area guide booklet.

The clues should be carved into seats, picnic tables, gates or bridge handrails – wherever the story coincides with one of these practical artefacts. At other locations they should be carved into bespoke objects such as boulders in rural locations and tactile metal plaques in the village. In some cases, carved boulders might be partially submerged in view of loch side seats, so they are not immediately obvious.



The writer(s) and designer(s) should decide the exact locations for clues through working closely with the client group and the local community. However, we recommend the following are considered:

- ◆ Auld Simon;
- ◆ The Cross;
- ◆ Lochwinnoch’s churches;
- ◆ Former Cooperage yard;
- ◆ Harvey Square;
- ◆ Old Court House;
- ◆ Calderhaugh Mill;
- ◆ Wade’s Bridge;
- ◆ Lade Bridge;
- ◆ Railway bridge;
- ◆ Castle Semple Loch shore (various places);
- ◆ Blackditch Bay;
- ◆ Parkhill grotto and pond;

- ◆ Courtshaw Hill maze;
- ◆ Parkhill Wood ice houses;
- ◆ Collegiate Church;
- ◆ Low Semple;
- ◆ Kenmure Hill temple;
- ◆ Fancy Bridge;
- ◆ Peel Tower.

Interpretive sculptures

We **recommend** that a programme of designing and locating interpretive artistic installations be established and that sculptors / artists be commissioned to create unique artworks, either permanent or semi-permanent, that reflect the area's sense of place and offer inherent interpretive messages.

Providing interpretation through environmental artwork is particularly valuable for local people, as the process of design and manufacture can involve schools and adult groups. Production of the pieces can also be phased over a number of years to retain the interest and involvement of people who visit the site regularly.



We **recommend** that sculptures be provided at the following locations:

- ◆ beside the grotto in Parkhill Wood, replacing the existing stone feature;
- ◆ beside the fish ponds / ice houses in Parkhill Wood;
- ◆ at the centre of the Courtshaw Hill maze;
- ◆ at a suitable location within the RSPB Nature Reserve;
- ◆ outside Castle Semple Centre.

Sculptural installations could also be inspired by environmental themes and include giant windchimes, water-driven or solar-powered structures or skyscapes¹⁵.

We strongly **recommend** that some or all of these installations be interactive in some way, so that visitors can engage physically as well as intellectually with them. A simple example of this would be a sundial where the visitor acts as the gnomon; other features may be designed to be manipulated, to climb through or sit on – we envisage these almost as ‘play equipment for grown-ups’ as well as for children. The importance of even the simplest interaction cannot be overstated, particularly when an underlying interpretive element or message is incorporated to provide meaning as well as entertainment.

¹⁵ Skyscapes are specially constructed chambers open to the sky, in which visitors can pause, experience and consider the sky, weather and play of light. See www.kielder.org/art/skysp.htm and www.yssp.co.uk for the skyscapes of James Turrell, American ‘sculptor of light’

Interpretive publications

Orientation leaflet

We **recommend** that a single orientation leaflet be produced to introduce visitors to the whole project area. This should include access points (via Lochwinnoch and Howwood stations and villages), all key features of interest and a brief interpretive introduction to paint a clear picture of the significance of the ‘water ways’ of this significant landscape. It should also provide guidance on how to enjoy the ‘interpretive clues’ installations.

The leaflet should be available at the two visitor centres, in shops and other outlets in both villages and in neighbouring communities and the wider TIC network.

We also strongly **recommend**, in advance of the production of this and all other interpretation and orientation material, that the project team agrees the names and any other relevant details of all parts of the site. This will ensure consistent terminology across all media and avoid the current confusion amongst staff, local people and visitors.

Guide booklet

We **recommend** that a more detailed guide booklet be produced to provide additional insight into the story of the project area from both the natural and a cultural history viewpoints, drawing the elements together to present a cohesive picture of its ‘water ways’. This should be on sale at the two visitor centres, in shops and other outlets in both villages and in neighbouring communities, and be available at all local libraries.

Postcards

We **recommend** that the management team consider commissioning a postcard or series of postcards that are available free¹⁶ to visitors and local people. Each postcard could show a particular local quality such as wildlife, cycling or boating and/or could include a short summary of the ten best things to see and do in the area. These should be of high quality – to reflect the quality of the experience at Lochwinnoch – and could perhaps be sponsored by local businesses.

These postcards could be made available at the visitor centres and at shops, pubs, cafés, the library etc in Lochwinnoch and Howwood. The postcards could also be handed out in the visitor centre car parks at busy times, for example, or distributed during events and activities such as the new farmers’ markets at Castle Semple. This would encourage direct person to person recommendation of the area, which is an extremely important marketing tool, as well as raising the awareness amongst local people and visitors of the range of highlights and activities available in the area.

¹⁶ It is recommended that care is taken to ensure that the postcards are either of sufficient quality that its free status is not an issue and/or that it is not obvious to the recipient that it was free.

Websites

Websites are becoming, increasingly, a principal source of information, and to some degree, interpretation for many people. At present, there are specific websites for Clyde Muirshiel Country Park, which includes Castle Semple Loch and Centre, for RSPB reserves which includes the Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve, and for Lochwinnoch and Howwood villages. The Lochwinnoch Village site has links to both the Clyde Muirshiel and RSPB (Lochwinnoch) sites. All carry information and some orientation; there is limited interpretation on the RSPB and Lochwinnoch sites, with interpretation on Howwood within the PDF of the village walks leaflet.

We **recommend** that all sites are developed to provide additional orientation, information and interpretation, and links to appropriate sites, and that the 'water ways @ Lochwinnoch' approach acts as an umbrella for a programme of integrated interpretation across all the sites. It is essential that the design guide is used when developing this material, to ensure consistency, and that the websites are regularly updated to promote activities, events, wildlife sightings and so on.

Interpretive manual

We strongly **recommend** that the team puts together an information and interpretation manual, which can then be distributed to all staff, volunteers and activity providers within the study area. This concise manual should provide all the information for new and existing staff and volunteers who engage with the public, enabling them to quickly and easily answer questions, direct visitors to other sources of information, and to interpret the wildlife, landscape and history of the area. It should be regularly updated and also include up-to-date information on activities and events. This manual should be available at both visitor centres, carried in the rangers' vehicles, offered to new volunteers, provided for walk leaders and so on, so that information and interpretation are agreed, consistent and readily available.

Interpretive tours

Audio tour

Given their cost to develop, the need to charge for their use and the challenges of management, we make no recommendation for one or more audio tours, but suggest an alternative below.

MP3 / mobile phone tour

We **recommend** consideration be given to developing an audio tour available for downloading onto an MP3 or IPOD player. However, with the advances in technology, it may be more expeditious, and useful for visitors, if such audio tours were available for downloading on to the latest generation of mobile telephones which nearly everyone now possesses.

We also **recommend** that only one tour be produced, capable of easy updating, to cover the whole project area but with each element accessible at the user's choice, prompted by numbered signs on site or numbers on the orientation leaflet. Only a brief introduction to the 'water ways' theme should be included.

‘Swandola’ boat trips

We **recommend** that consideration be given to introducing guided boat trips on Castle Semple Loch using a solar-powered or similar ‘green’ vessel. The most comprehensive understanding of the whole project area is gained from the Loch – when delivered by trained and experienced wardens – and the boat trips would provide an additional and popular attraction, although this would be at a cost to visitors in order to make the trips at least partly viable.

Guided tours

We **recommend** that the existing programme of talks, guided walks, introductory sessions etc should be developed to promote and explain the ‘water ways’ theme in all its manifestations and at all levels. This should range from simply incorporating short elements of interpretation when providing introductory training to more detailed and comprehensive interpretation on specific walks.

10 Environment and infrastructure

In this chapter, we make recommendations for improvements for new or enhanced infrastructure covering:

- ◆ the overall environment;
- ◆ the path network;
- ◆ car parking;
- ◆ access structures including:
 - ◆ gates
 - ◆ bridges;
 - ◆ seats;
 - ◆ signage and waymarking;
- ◆ Lochwinnoch.

In a few cases, comments in the section below reflect recommendations made in earlier sections.

The overall environment

The quality of a destination’s facilities are second only in importance to the quality of its environments in its ability to attract visitors. Facilities such as paths, cafés, shops, boat hire and bike hire are a very important part of the experience for visitors. There is a strong trend towards visitors preferring multi-faceted leisure experiences that combine sightseeing, activities, culture, shopping, eating and drinking. Other trends that should influence the facilities provided at Castle Semple Loch include:

- ◆ growing affluence and more disposable income being spent on experiences than on goods;
- ◆ increasing focus on achieving wellbeing and happiness as opposed to amassing wealth and goods (quality over quantity);

- ◆ people are increasingly time-poor and obsessed with making the most of their leisure activities¹⁷;
- ◆ with leisure time being so precious, people are less likely to tolerate poor quality facilities and service;
- ◆ expectations for the quality of design in leisure environments has grown hugely in recent years;
- ◆ across the market, people want to feel special and have access to luxury goods and services (mass luxury);
- ◆ authenticity in places and experiences are highly valued (eg connoisseurship of wine, coffee, chocolate, olive oil).

While these trends have a direct bearing not simply on the quality of interpretation at a destination but on the overall satisfaction with, and enjoyment of, a place where interpretation has a part to play. Unhappy or uncomfortable or dissatisfied visitors are a poor audience for interpretation facilities.

It is important to acknowledge at this point that the Castle Semple Centre does currently meet the needs of one of its target audiences very effectively through its 'cheap and cheerful' approach. Any developments at the Centre need to be carefully judged to avoid creating a new ambience or offering new facilities that may alienate this loyal audience. However, there is clearly potential to attract visitors that are looking for a high quality experience, which would require an upgrade of at least some of the facilities in the study area.

It is our view that, certainly in the short to medium term, both audiences could be comfortably accommodated within the Castle Semple Centre by offering a range of provision at the site. This could include, for example, continuing to provide space for users bringing their own food and drink, selling mugs of filter coffee as well as cups of cappuccino, offering basic pocket-money items in the shop as well as high quality postcards and publications and integrating a range of interpretation throughout the experience. Indeed, the Centre may be pleasantly surprised to discover that its existing audiences enjoy the opportunity to sample new and different products and activities.

Recommendation – While the SRANI project can have little direct influence on the providers of the study area's wider 'leisure experience', we recommend that, wherever possible, opportunities are taken to encourage the enhancement of existing facilities or the provision of new ones. Where the partners in SRANI have direct responsibility for facilities, these should be enhanced or developed to meet current expectations.

In the course of local consultation, we were interested to be contacted by a local landowner who could see possible opportunities for building visitor accommodation within the study area to enhance its appeal and facilities on the one hand and to create employment and economic benefit on the other. Clearly, this type of development would require careful consideration on planning and environmental grounds but as a spontaneous reaction to our draft report it was encouraging and we hope, if pursued, would have a positive outcome.

¹⁷ We note however that a key current audience for Castle Semple Centre is time-rich but not necessarily financially affluent, and that the existing facilities do meet this particular group's needs

The constraints of anti-social behaviour

While some anti-social behaviour is transient – drunken antics, noise and passing nuisance to other people – vandalism is a more permanent aspect and one which appears to be endemic in semi-rural as well as urban society. Some of our proposals, such as lookootheries, sculptural installations and even seating, have raised concern amongst the client team for their potential to add considerably to maintenance costs. In some cases, the fear of vandalism may prevent the provision of otherwise desirable installations.

Experience elsewhere has shown that the situation is not without hope. In many cases, where new installations have provided useful facilities for young people (eg meeting places where they want to meet rather than where ‘authority’ has suggested they meet) or that entertain and relate to young people’s interests have suffered less or little from unwanted behaviour. Sometimes they attract this behaviour once and, if remedial action is speedy, it doesn’t happen again.

There is a strong case for involving young people in a variety of ways in proposing, designing, contributing to and maintaining installations to make them part of the process and not simply spectators who may feel disenfranchised at best or actively opposed at worst. There is no simple solution, however, and anything done to alleviate the situation usually takes time, effort, patience and resilience.

The path network

Castle Semple Loch has the potential to provide countryside access opportunities that appeal to a variety of leisure-orientated recreational path users, ranging from dog walkers and buggy-pushers to family cyclists and horse-riders. While low-level walking and long-distance cycling are already available elsewhere in the area, opportunities for horse-riding and family-orientated off-road cycling are very scarce.

In particular, there is likely to be a significant demand amongst individuals and families for circular low-level off-road cycling in a high quality landscape setting. A family-friendly multi-use path circling Castle Semple Loch would provide a powerful new attraction for this market. Arguably, this represents the most important development opportunity available to the area at this time. However, we accept the possible conflict of interest between providing a round-the-Loch path, open to all, and maintaining the comparative peace enjoyed on the east side of the Loch. The sheer length of the route, some 8km, will act as a filter for many.

Recommendation – We understand it has proved difficult to obtain agreement regarding access over land needed to complete this path on level ground around the loch shore. So important is this opportunity to the development potential of the area that we recommend further efforts are made to secure agreement to the required access through the provision of a board walk along the margin of the Loch.

Car parking

One solution to the problem of insufficient car parking space at Castle Semple Centre was proposed by the Ross Anderson Consultancy report. It suggested the

removal of that part of the former railway embankment which effectively divides the Loch from the village. This would provide substantial additional space for a variety of purposes including landscaped parking. While the cost of this project could rule out its implementation, the proposal is still 'live'. It would certainly offer the substantial benefit of opening up views of the Loch from the village and views of Lochwinnoch from the Castle Semple Centre, in addition to providing parking and other space. This visual linkage would help considerably to strengthen the links between village and Loch and encourage more visitors to Castle Semple to use village facilities. While we would support this proposal, we have not included it as a formal recommendation as such.

Access structures

Access infrastructure such as signs, seats, gates and bridges can be used to reinforce a sense of local distinctiveness and to create a visual identity that helps coalesce otherwise diverse locations and elements into a single unified destination. Such structures will appear in environments ranging from village and Visitor Centre, to farmland, lochside and policy woodland. The visual design of these structures should complement their immediate surroundings and help to create a distinctive identity for the area. The design of static interpretation media, where it is provided, should link in with the overall approach.

While the detailed design of these artefacts should be the subject of a separate project, we would suggest that a limited palette of materials, forms and colours is adopted. By varying some of these attributes while keeping others constant, structures can be tailored to fit their immediate surroundings, while retaining a strong family identity.

Gates

A number of galvanised metal gates and other access barriers have been installed as part of a new path linking the station with the Castle Semple Centre. These were deliberately specified as low-cost utilitarian structures, with the intention of replacing them with more attractive items as part of a design plan for the wider area. These new structures are broadly similar in appearance to the agricultural specification gates in use at other points around the Loch.

While not unattractive, the existing metal gates do not positively contribute to the quality appearance or local distinctiveness of the area, especially when they are used away from agricultural areas. Additionally, the prominent gates and other obstructions appear unfriendly and are at odds with the ambition to create a welcoming attraction based on access opportunities.

Extensive use of access controls also goes against best practice for outdoor access which suggests that barrier free environments produce opportunities for the widest possible audience. It is important that, in situations where gates have been introduced to prevent access by horses, these are not in contravention of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, ie where they are required to protect designated land areas.

An opportunity now exists to rationalise the access infrastructure around the Loch by removing unnecessary barriers and replacing necessary ones with more attractive structures. Timber or cast metal bollards might be used for vehicular access control in place of gates and other tubular steel barriers. Traditional metal field gates might be retained for stock control in grazing areas. Other barriers should prove largely unnecessary.

Recommendation – We recommend the removal of access barriers not necessary to control stock or prevent unlawful use of paths by vehicles. Where possible, vehicle barriers should be replaced by less obtrusive structures such as bollards and standard metal agricultural gates should be used only for stock control in grazing areas.

Bridges

Bridges can be highly evocative and exciting environmental structures that connect people and places, while demonstrating excellence in technology and engineering.

There are many different types of bridge already used within the study area, ranging from traditional stone arch bridges to modern recycled-plastic beam bridges and much in between. Due to the relatively high cost and specific requirements of individual bridges, it is not feasible to recommend a single type of bridge for all future uses or to consider the replacement of existing structures.

Recommendation – Bridges provide exciting opportunities for provoking thought at important transition points within the landscape. We recommend that, wherever possible, new bridges should be individually designed to suit their specific locations, to celebrate the technology involved and to provoke thought about some aspect of the environment. Every new bridge should be a significant and positive addition to its environment. This recommendation can be extended to safety and other fencing.

Seats

Seats are a very important component of any access-orientated recreation initiative. Everyone likes to sit down, rest a while and contemplate a fine view. Regular rest stops are essential for many people if they are to partake in outdoor access. The Countryside for All guidelines recommend rest places every 100m if a route is to be fully accessible. Wherever possible, seats should be placed in a sunny spot or one where there is a significant view – preferable both.

Seats come in many forms, ranging from formal benches and perches, through sculptural seats, to conveniently placed logs and boulders. Traditional ‘park’ benches are best suited to urban or other highly-managed situations such as Lochwinnoch village. Chunky modern seats work well in transitional areas such as the loch-shore path, although these simpler structures also work well in towns. Natural logs and boulders suit less highly managed areas such as Kenmure Hill. Sculptural seats can be designed to suit any type of environment.



There is already a tradition of placing perch seats on the loch-shore path and within Parkhill Wood, although some of these are poorly located and orientated. While adequate for a brief rest, these seats are not conducive to taking a more relaxing break to contemplate the view or to converse with a companion. While we acknowledge that the existing perch seats are FieldFare approved, we would argue that other styles of perches, designed to be as effective in meeting the needs of visitors but more comfortable and appealing to the eye, should replace the existing perches when they reach the end of their life. Some should be re-sited now.

Recommendation – We recommend the re-siting of some existing perch seats around Castle Semple Loch and in Parkhill Wood and their replacement, over time, with more attractively-designed (but equally accessible) structures providing for brief stops. A series of comfortable and inviting seats should be designed, made and installed at the points where people naturally want to stop and enjoy their surroundings and where there are specific stories to tell. The seats should include interpretive messages where appropriate. The perch seats should be seen as providing additional rest stops for people with reduced mobility.

Signage and waymarking

Effective signing is vital to help identify the study area as a cohesive whole, to raise awareness of the available opportunities and to guide people safely and swiftly to where they want to go. Signs and panels provide carriers for orientation, direction, identification, interpretation, regulation and general information. They have a relatively long life and are available to visitors when other sources of information are not. However, signs can create an unwelcome intrusion into quality environments and should be used sparingly and with careful thought to design and location.

We have considered the use of ‘gateway signs’ on the roads entering the study area. We do not think it appropriate in this case, as installing signs featuring ‘Lochwinnoch’ or ‘Castle Semple Loch’ at locations remote from the town or the lock is likely to cause confusion to visitors.

Recommendation – We recommend the design and installation of effective vehicle direction signing for all attractions within the study area. A distinctive system of pedestrian direction signs (fingerposts and waymarkers) for primary destinations and routes should also be designed and implemented. Identification signs for Lochwinnoch village and the Castle Semple Centre should be replaced with signs designed to project a high quality image.

The visitor centres

Cafés

Eating and drinking is now an integral part of the leisure experience for most people. The dramatic rise over recent years in the number of cafés selling luxury espresso-based coffee shows us the type of café experience favoured by a majority of consumers. For attraction operators, in addition to direct revenue generation, cafés attract more visitors to the site and increase dwell time, hence producing additional income for other on-site facilities.

The key elements for a café catering to the current market are genuine espresso coffee freshly made by a 'barista', blended and speciality teas, a range of quality soft drinks, fresh cakes and pastries, interesting hot and cold snacks (sandwiches, paninis, etc). The quality of the food and drink should be matched by the quality of the environment, including the space, decoration and furnishing.

The standard 'recipe' for a contemporary café should be varied to suit the character or theme of a particular development. In the case of an attraction based around outdoor activities, a theme featuring healthy food and drink would be highly appropriate. This might include home baking, fruit, salads and fresh juice drinks, along with a preference for organic products.

Recommendation – We recommend that the feasibility of redeveloping the cafés at the Castle Semple Centre and the RSPB Visitor Centre should be explored to develop them in line with current consumer expectations. The new cafés should take full advantage of the available waterside views, create attractive leisure environments and offer high quality and distinctive food and drink. Within this, however, the policy of working to support, rather than undermine, the interests of local traders should remain in place.

Shops

Shopping is also an important component of a multi-faceted visitor experience and one where a return on investment can usually be made. While turning a profit is the primary objective for commercial organisations, other considerations are often just as relevant for those whose remit includes education and other public benefits.

In addition to generating income, shops can provide valuable opportunities for environmental interpretation, influencing consumer behaviour and local economic development. Interpretation can be carried out by attaching heritage and environment-related messages to appropriate products and displays. Influencing consumer behaviour involves stocking products that are environmentally benign and those that support a more active and healthy lifestyle. Economic development can be helped by providing an outlet for locally-produced products such as arts and crafts.

To achieve anything other than economic returns, a shop's product lines must be themed around the interest of the attraction, destination or organisation. The experience of the Eden Project, both National Trusts and the RSPB suggests that economic benefits are also maximised when the products relate strongly to the site messages or experiences. This is because visitors to a particular site are naturally

predisposed to related products and because they are often looking for a souvenir of their experience and are more likely to find this in appropriately themed goods.

Recommendation – The Castle Semple Centre should consider how the space available can best be utilised. It may be that customer satisfaction and profit margins would be improved by expanding the café into the area currently occupied by the shop. Alternatively, if market research suggests that a shop is required, consideration should be given to theming the product lines around local goods, natural materials, the environment, outdoor leisure, cycling and walking. Interpretive messages might be attached to appropriate products to communicate ideas, influence behaviour and to increase sales by making people feel good about their purchases.

We would encourage the continued practice of playing host to farmers' markets and other similar events to widen the scope, appeal and economic achievement of the study area and the Castle Semple site itself. We also endorse the implicit practice of working alongside, rather than in competition with, local trading interests.

Lochwinnoch

The appearance of the village at street level could be transformed into something worthy of its status as a conservation village simply by painting the buildings in a carefully selected palette of colours and replacing the inappropriate windows with period reproductions.

Recommendation – We recommend that the feasibility of introducing a grant-aid scheme to encourage High Street property owners to carry out external improvement works should be investigated. Any such scheme would use the incentive of financial support to exercise influence over choice of colours and design of windows and shop signs through a professionally-produced architectural style guide that takes full account of the strictures imposed by the conservation area status of the village.

We recognise that this is outwith the terms of our brief but see this as an important element within a holistic view of the attraction of the study area as a whole. It is also outwith the scope and aims of the SRANI project but discussion of the recommendation may stimulate others to take appropriate action,

11 Delivery mechanisms, potential contractors and staff resources

It is likely that the individual agencies and organisations making up the SRANI group will assume full responsibility for delivering projects based on the sites under their direct control. In the majority of cases, where professional authoring, design, project management and production skills are not available in-house, we would strongly recommend these functions are carried out by appropriate specialist contractors.

With creative work, project management and bespoke manufacture, the value of high quality work over time (in increased effectiveness and decreased maintenance) far outweighs any additional initial costs when compared to commissioning average quality work. We therefore recommend contractors are selected on their ability to add value over the life of the project rather than simply on their initial commissioning costs.

Even with the day-to-day authoring, design, project management and production taken care of by others, the staff time and expertise required within the partner organisations to oversee implementation of these project successfully should not be underestimated. Adequate staff resources must be made available to oversee the projects if the return on investment is to be maximised.

While individual agencies and organisations will be responsible for delivering the majority of projects on the ground, a high degree of cooperative working will be needed if the overall project is to fulfil its potential of providing 'more than the sum of its parts'.

Collaborative working will be required in connection with:

- ◆ raising funds from external sources;
- ◆ developing the shared vision and aims for the area;
- ◆ developing and upholding area-wide quality standards (through interpretive manual, design guides, etc);
- ◆ delivering area-wide projects such as the brand identity, orientation panels, orientation leaflet, guidebook, marketing initiatives, website, etc.

The SRANI group will obviously fulfil the key requirement for coordination between the various agencies, organisations and communities during the project implementation phase. However, it is not clear who will assume responsibility for delivering the area-wide projects that are not 'attached' to any particular member. While responsibility for these tasks might be shared out amongst the group members, consideration should be given to employing a project officer under the direct control of the SRANI group. In addition to overseeing implementation of area-wide projects, this person would service the administrative requirements of the group as a whole.

Funding

We have not been asked to provide information on funding sources overall, but offer here a number of potential sources for funding those elements that could be described broadly as 'art works'. The availability of funds that might pay for, or contribute to our suggested sculptural, interactive and related media has not been checked either generally or specifically, but from experience elsewhere, sources could include, in no particular order, the following:

- ◆ local authority special funds;
- ◆ local or regional economic / social development agencies, eg Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire;
- ◆ national environmental, conservation or related agencies with a specific interest in the study area, eg Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Water;
- ◆ local fundraising efforts;

- ◆ donations and / or sponsorship from individuals or, more often, corporate bodies, eg major firms based in or operating from the area;
- ◆ Scottish Arts Council, or SAC-supported funds;
- ◆ National Lottery or Lottery-supported funds;
- ◆ charitable bodies with arts / environmental / social / cultural objectives.

12 Maintenance, updating and replacement

Installing new visitor facilities and communications should be seen not as the end-point of a project, but as the beginning of a long term commitment to ongoing maintenance, updating and eventual replacement or removal. We believe that visitor infrastructure should be introduced only if responsibility for its ongoing upkeep is assumed by, and built into the future budgets of, the commissioning organisations.

The quality of the overall visitor experience will be significantly eroded with every encounter of a non-working exhibit, graffiti-covered panel, broken railing or other example of poor maintenance. Broken or vandalised facilities create an impression of neglect, leading to a downward spiral of reduced visitation and further vandalism. All facilities should therefore be the subject of a formal programme of routine inspections, giving rise to immediate repair, replacement or removal of damaged items.

In common with all visitor attractions, to sustain its position in the market, Lochwinnoch will also need to refresh its landscapes, buildings, facilities, information and overall visitor experience at regular intervals. This will require an ongoing programme of incremental refurbishment and improvement works for all facilities, along with a major redevelopment of the information and interpretive content at five to seven year intervals.

13 Monitoring and evaluation

It will be important that the SRANI management undertakes three types of 'checking' activity in terms of planning, implementing, managing and maintaining its interpretation – the pre-testing of new interpretive media, the monitoring of the use of interpretive media and the evaluation of media and of the Interpretation Masterplan as a whole.

There are many methods that can be used to undertake each of these three activities and we identify a number of them below. The list is not exhaustive but indicates some of the methods that can be employed to take stock of different elements of the Interpretation Masterplan. However, in the period leading up to implementation, and ideally in conjunction with pre-testing, it will be important to review, or to gather both quantitative and qualitative statistical data, as well as anecdotal evidence, of current visitor numbers, activities, preferences and expectations. This will provide

a platform for making immediate comparisons and will establish starting points for 'graphs' used in continued monitoring and evaluation. Some of this material already exists; more should be collected.

Pre-testing

Pre-testing is something that many organisations fail to do because 'deadlines' are cited as the need to get things on the ground, or out in the public domain. On the principle of 'getting it right, rather than getting it now', we advocate strongly that the management team tests out new media, from simple leaflets to the concept of 'lookooteries', from examples of interpretive clues to new leaflets, before committing final expenditure and implementation work. A further benefit of this approach is in ensuring that the local community is given a chance to feed into the development process.

In terms of printed and graphic material, this process is now simpler and cheaper with the availability of computer-derived artwork that can be produced inexpensively and circulated, if testing printed material, or set up with suitable lamination at suitable sites if testing outdoor text or illustrations. Reactions can be sought from selected or random users / viewers, from 'focus groups' or otherwise chosen groups of people or by other means that ensure wide pre-implementation appraisal and approval.

For the lookooteries, it may be necessary to prepare a mock-up of at least one design to test usage, reactions and practicability. The cost should be seen as an investment to avoid costly mistakes or missed opportunities.

Monitoring

Once media are in place, then monitoring their use and / or success can be done in a variety of ways, often in conjunction with evaluation. For example, the following largely quantitative checks could be instituted:

- ◆ maintaining accurate checks of questions asked, material issued etc at the two visitor Centres and on guided walking / cycling / boat tours;
- ◆ maintaining accurate records of printed material distributed and replenished;
- ◆ maintaining accurate records of enquiries made;
- ◆ maintaining records of wardens' contacts with members of the public;
- ◆ maintaining records of numbers of visitors on guided tours and at other events etc;
- ◆ systematic counts of numbers of visitors reading interpretive panels, following the interpretive clues, website hits etc;
- ◆ observation of visitors' use of interpretive panels, printed material, interpretive clues etc.

Evaluation

The more time-consuming and therefore costly aspects of the work of appraising success are those that involve qualitative research, which can include:

- ◆ face-to-face interviewing of visitors (and non-visitors);
- ◆ distribution of questionnaires for self-completion;

- ◆ use of focus groups, private and public meetings etc;
- ◆ analysis of questions asked and answered (or not) at reception and other counters, by wardens etc;
- ◆ analysis of unsolicited written communications by email, letter or otherwise.

In our experience, few organisations undertake any or more than a little monitoring and evaluation and only occasional pre-testing is undertaken. In a commercial environment, such appraisal of the potential success, as well as the actual success, of a product would normally be undertaken as part of the overall product development and marketing functions. The same should be done by any organisation responsible for spending substantial sums on activities of public benefit.

Both the Regional Park and the RSPB have already undertaken some surveying of visitors in recent years, which provides a good basis on which to build; however more detailed collection and analysis of these statistics will be necessary. We therefore recommend that the management team implement a programme of pre-testing, monitoring and evaluation to provide essential data and anecdotal material that will inform the Interpretation Masterplan and guide it throughout its implementation. Given that the interpretive proposals explored here are likely to be phased over the coming years, it is particularly recommended that the management team dedicates time and resources to the evaluation process in order to determine those new activities and initiatives that are particularly successful. This will ensure that future resources can be effectively targeted in future phases.

14 Action table, timescales, priorities and costings

This section includes all the recommendations we have made throughout the report including those relating to contracting, maintenance etc. Timescales for implementation are the estimated periods from planning to completion. Priorities are expressed in terms of those installations or activities that we believe **must** be implemented (A, against blue background); those that **should** be implemented (B); and those **could** be carried out if appropriate and where funds become available (C).

The proposed year of implementation (ie the year in which the period of implementation is completed) is expressed over four years. All costs are orders of cost, ie indicative, and are deliberately pitched at the upper end of likely expenditure, representing high quality provision. All costs exclude VAT.

What we offer below is, in effect, a menu from which the client team can select those elements, particularly the priorities, to which they give their own stamp of priority. We recognise that the total bill is high – well over £1million if uncosted elements are included – but we would not expect all of the proposed items to be on an initial shopping list, even although we believe all our category A priorities justify implementation.

@ LOCHWINNOCH INTERPRETIVE MASTERPLAN ACTION TABLE

<i>Recommended action</i>	<i>Priority</i>	<i>Year of implementation (ie completion)</i>				<i>Capital cost £</i>	<i>Revenue cost £ pa</i>
Preliminary tasks							
Team to agree names and locations of all features	A	X				0	not costed
Establish baseline data for evaluation and monitoring	A	X				10,000	0
Agree interpretive themes and holistic approach	A	X				0	not costed
Commission a design guide for all partnership media	A	X				15,000	0
Work with BEN to explore opportunities for attracting more ethnic minorities to area	B		X			0	not costed
Interpretive centres							
Upgrade RSPB centre interior	A			X		not costed	
Landscape RSPB centre exterior and upgrade car park	A			X		not costed	
Upgrade Castle Semple Centre interior	A			X		not costed	
Landscape Castle Semple Centre exterior and upgrade car park	A			X		not costed	
Interpretive displays							
Upgrade RSPB centre displays	A			X		98,000	9,800
Upgrade Castle Semple Centre displays	A			X		112,000	11,200
Interpretive lookootheries							
Phase I (3 installations)	A		X			88,000	8,800
Phase 2 (2 installations)	A			X		59,000	5,900
Phase 3 (2 installations)	B				X	59,000	5,900

‘Fixed’ interpretive media							
Area orientation panels for Lochwinnoch Station, Castle Semple car park, RSPB car park and Howwood village	A	X				23,000	2,300
Interpretive clues							
Author, design and produce interpretive ‘clues’ (20)	A		X			29,000	1,450
Interpretive sculptures							
Commission 1	B	X				15,000	750
Commission 2	B		X			15,000	750
Commission 3	B			X		15,000	750
Commission 4	B				X	15,000	750
Interpretive publications							
Design and produce orientation leaflet for the whole site	A	X				15,000	3,000
Upgrade all relevant websites	A		X			10,000	2,000
Produce information and interpretation manual for staff and volunteers	A	X				12,000	0
Research, design and produce a guide booklet for whole site	B		X			28,000	0
Produce free postcards for distribution locally	B		X			8,000	800
Commission ‘Discover Lochwinnoch’ recycled paper bags for visitor centres and local shops	B			X		7,000	700
Interpretive tours							
Instigate programme of training for staff and / or volunteers for regular guided tours of the wider site	A	X				8,000	1,600
Commission audio tour company to identify the most effective approach to an audio tour for the wider site	C		X			5,000	0

Produce and install audio tour	C			X		15,000	1,500
Commission feasibility study into 'green' Swandola tours	C			X		8,000	0
Launch vessel(s) with interpretive guide / soundtrack	C				X	not costed	
Access structures							
Design and produce new seats (25) and perches (15)	A		X			37,000	1,850
Design and produce vehicular and pedestrian direction and arrival signs	A		X			73,000	3,650
Monitoring and evaluation							
Establish programme of information gathering to compare with baseline data	A	X	X	X	X	20,000	0
Establish programme for monitoring use and abuse of new installations	A		X	X	X	15,000	0
Assess findings annually as a minimum; review Masterplan according to findings	A		X	X	X	6,000	0
Remove or replace redundant gates and barriers	B		X			not costed	
Create new bridges as required	B					not costed	
Total – Year 1						103,000	8,000
Total – Year 2						305,000	28,000
Total – Year 3						326,000	58,000
Total – Year 4						86,000	65,000
Grand total						820,000	159,000

15 Appendix A: Consultees

Geoffrey Atkins, Access Officer, Scottish Natural Heritage

Paula Baker, Publicity Officer, RSPB

Zul Bhatia, Manager, Lochwinnoch Reserve, RSPB

Kate Cuthbert, Access Officer, Renfrewshire Council

David Fowles, Councillor, Lochwinnoch Community Council

Duncan Macintosh, Building Conservation Officer, Renfrewshire Council

Tom Marshall, Public Affairs Assistant, RSPB

Emily Miscioscia, Public Affairs Manager, RSPB

Aileen Monk, SRANI Paths Development Officer

David O'Neill, Assistant Park Manager, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park

Anne Phillips, Tourism Development Officer, Renfrewshire Council

John Webster, Senior Ranger, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park

Andrew Wilson, Councillor, Howwood Community Council

Charles Woodward, Manager, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park

and

many members of the Lochwinnoch and Howwood communities.

16 Appendix B: Accessibility

This chapter is divided into three sections:

- II.1 Physical and sensory access
- II.2 Intellectual, cultural and social access
- II.3 Financial access

5.1 Physical and sensory access

Physical access

In considering the provision of interpretation and its associated access and media, provision must be made for those with ambulatory difficulties. This will include the provision of easily-opened and negotiable gates and appropriately graded and surfaced paths to accepted standards, such as those in *Countryside for all*, produced by BT with The Fieldfare Trust. The general level of provision within the study area is good, although some parts, such as Parkhill Wood, are not accessible to wheelchairs or those with mobility problems, and nor will be the proposed path over Kenmure Hill. These exceptions are, we understand, acceptable under the Disability Discrimination Acts as good provision is made elsewhere.

Any installation of interpretive media within the respective visitor centres must allow them to be easily accessible to those in wheelchairs and to those with less severe ambulatory difficulties, as well as to children and those below average height. Our proposals take these strictures into account.

Sensory access

Many more people have sensory impairments than have physical difficulties and full recognition of these must be incorporated in any provision of interpretation. This often means 'belt and braces' approaches so that those with visual impairments can have an audio alternative, and vice-versa. The prime sensory impairment is of vision; in addition to the relatively small proportion of the visitor population who are blind, very many have impairments both on a graduated scale and of differing nature. Reasonable provision, to meet the majority of needs, involves the use of strong contrasting colours in provision of text and background, size and clarity of typeface, avoidance of 'tints' and text over pictures and so on.

Good lighting, ease of reading position, appropriate height levels for text panels and so on are some of the key considerations also, and there is now plenty of advice available to interpreters and designers on preparing universally-accessible graphic material. This includes the use of Braille (where appropriate), tactile elements, raised lettering and symbols, three-dimensional displays and so on.

For those whose sight makes movement a challenge through blindness or poor vision, changes in surfaces, railings at appropriate heights and so on are all recommended. We would also expect any full-time or voluntary rangers on duty to

be able to assist those who need help to move about. A training programme to include this and other elements of the interpretive and customer service provision may need to be instigated for staff and volunteers if it has not already been provided.

Where publications are issued, large print versions should be available at least on request (eg through on-the-spot computer printouts) and, ideally, audio versions. Audio versions of text on panels should be provided where practicable. These could be incorporated within the audio-tour that we have proposed.

For those with hearing impairments, any audio interpretation should be capable of volume control to increase sound levels. Induction loops should be used within visitor centres and, for the profoundly deaf, printed versions (or summaries) of the audio and MP3 tour scripts should be available, for example on laminated sheets in large print.

Impaired sense of taste and / or smell is not likely to affect interpretive media although a poor sense of touch could affect appreciation of stonework, sculptures, installations and so on.

5.2 Intellectual, cultural and social access

Intellectual access

We use the term intellectual access to relate to those with learning difficulties, which range very widely from the largely unnoticed (by others) to the severely impaired. In practical terms, it is possible to do a great deal to improve accessibility and some of the factors introduced to meet sensory needs apply in the case of intellectual needs as well – clarity of graphics, good contrasts between text and background colours, approved typefaces, short lines, short sentences, an absence of jargon or technical terms and the use of plenty of images and illustrations.

One of the most common difficulties experienced by a large proportion (up to 30%) of the population is in reading. Interpreters often take for granted that visitors will have reasonable reading skills but then express surprise when people do not read carefully honed and presented text. Text needs to be kept to a minimum, it must be structured through a hierarchy of clear (but ideally catchy) headlines, introductory paragraphs in larger type and, if needed, follow up text at a readable size. The layout of good tabloid newspapers is a useful guide.

Use of references to familiar objects, experiences, events and so on aids understanding and this applies to all visitors. The techniques of storytelling, as old as civilization, should be employed as widely as possible as they provide the foundation for all our learning from childhood upwards. The power of the story does not lessen as we age although the content and presentation may do so.

Clear illustrations – not fussy diagrams – aid comprehension, and the use of characters that become immediately recognisable as ‘explainers’ helps many with learning difficulties to maintain attention and gain from the story being told. In the case of Castle Semple Loch / Lochwinnoch, a unique ‘symbol’ could be chosen as an ‘icon’ to follow, in whatever form it might be developed – it could be the swan we referred to earlier. However, much will also depend on the interpretation being

easily comprehensible to helpers who can do a second level of interpretation for those whose learning abilities are impaired.

Anything that is done to aid the comprehension by those with intellectual difficulties will also help the average visitor – if it is properly done and avoids ‘dumbing down’, a pejorative term used of interpretation by those, often knowledgeable only in their own subject and unwilling to recognize that others, like them, have much to learn of subjects not familiar to them.

An audio tour, or a more advanced hand-held video-supported tour, if carefully devised, will benefit those with learning difficulties, but personal interpretation, by full-time or voluntary rangers working with helpers, will be very effective, particularly if they use simple ‘visual aids’. The Park has a good record of welcoming those with learning difficulties and the foregoing may not require more than limited development of existing facilities.

Cultural access

It is easier to meet physical and sensory needs, and even intellectual needs, than those that are culture-based. In the last case, more judgment comes into play as to what may or may not be culturally accessible. In the case, particularly, of the stories of the former Semple estate and of Lochwinnoch, it is not safe to assume that visitors, or even some local people, will have an awareness or knowledge of the wider cultural and social history of the area, and of Scotland, into which the Semple story fits, or of architectural, religious or other elements which are part of the story.

For some people, the whole apparent complexities of the natural world are foreign to their cultural background and they need help to gain initial access which they themselves can build upon once their confidence has been supported. In both cases, young people often need more guidance as their cultural tethers are less developed.

Social access

Many of the same principles relating to cultural access apply to social access. Nature reserves and wider countryside interests as often seen as essentially middle-class, demanding an intellectual involvement beyond the normal ambit of many people but such facilities can be accessible with the right form of welcome and approach. All staff need to offer an inclusiveness of welcome, but this must also be reflected in the way the interpretation is devised and implemented if the study area, and the centres in particular, is to be an ‘open house’ to all. This applies to events and activities as well – they need to be aimed at a variety of audiences rather than always aiming at an all-embracing audience where there is a danger of trying to please everybody and ending up pleasing few.

5.3 Financial access

As neither the Castle Semple Centre nor the RSPB Visitor Centre make a charge for entry, there is no initial barrier to visitors with limited, or no resources. Under the provision of the Land Reform Scotland Act (2003), and as explained in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, the Nature Reserve will be open to all those using the round-the-loch walk.

The audio / MP3 / mobile phone tours proposed would need to be charged for to be viable, but a printed summary should be available to those who cannot afford the tour, are unable to use it or indeed may not want to take it. Other services will, of course, require payment including binocular and bike and hire of sports equipment, and some events.

5.4 Meeting specific needs

Much of what has been said about meeting the needs of those with, for example, learning difficulties applies to visitors as a whole, as we indicated at one point. Making access easy to all should be the aim, and in doing so this automatically embraces some at least of the specific requirements of special groups.

Families

Providing accessibility for families puts additional, but not insuperable, demands on interpretation designed primarily for an adult audience. Indeed, we would counsel an interpretive approach that considers children as a primary audience and then augments it for adults rather than trying to modify interpretation designed for adults. Many adult visitors neither want nor can absorb more than that aimed at the average ten to twelve year old child and, in targeting this age group, interpretation will embrace a much wider audience – as well as meeting other accessibility objectives.

Families with children need things to do and finding a symbol to act as an icon for interpretation around the study area, and including the centres, immediately provides an attracting, appealing and easily-recognisable storyline link. This could perhaps be the ubiquitous swan, which could also be used for way-finding markers, activity points and so on.

Allied to this, family-oriented interpretive quizzes, treasure hunts and so on can be very simply and inexpensively devised – the quality of content is the more important element. For example, the audio tour should be devised to appeal to children as well as adults, with perhaps special ‘kids’ bits’ as alternative elements both to catch children’s attention and to provide a simpler interpretation where extra explanation is needed.

For young children, colouring-in sheets and similar devices still have their value and can be used to introduce topics that might otherwise be considered ‘beyond’ them. Such material needs to be carefully planned and prepared as part of the whole interpretive approach and not provided simply as diversionary entertainment. One medium would be to devise games based on Castle Semple Loch and Lochwinnoch which could be played by families. These could be designed for use outside – and even to extend along the routes and trails – and could be along the lines of familiar board games that are adapted for the site such as snakes and ladders or ludo.

In catering for families, it is fair to assume that beyond the age of about twelve to fourteen, children on family visits need to be seen as part of the adult market at best or a separate and tricky sub-market; teenagers, as we note below, are a very different market from either children or adults. However, Castle Semple Loch and environs already benefits from attracting these groups to its various activities and events and

it is hoped that interpretation can be so integral to the experience of the site that learning and discovery will almost be 'by accident'!

Schoolchildren

The needs of schoolchildren, when coming on formal visits, are related to their curriculum. While many of the interpretive media prepared for children on leisure visits may be adaptable (and vice versa), it is important to involve schoolteachers in the preparation of educational material, which needs to be focused on specific topics and contexts. Again, such material need not be expensive but it should be devised as part of the whole interpretive exercise not only to meet its own needs but in order to make as much of it applicable or adaptable to other uses. The Council already provides a considerable amount of material designed for schools groups and that SRANI has already helped facilitate activities for schools by creating a suitable area for pond dipping.

Young people

Many visitor attractions agonise over the difficulty in attracting young people, particularly teenagers, as well as many of those who are into their early twenties. In almost every other facet of life, this age group 'gang their ain gait', both subconsciously and deliberately and trying to gain their attention for what may appear gloriously irrelevant, such as the stories of an old and partly ruined church, or of the landed gentry's pastimes, are almost a lost cause, certainly for the majority.

Certainly it is possible to put on events that meet the interests of some young people but the most successful means of access to the stories is through active participation in activities, whether water or land based. Through these, with careful admixture of interpretation, stories can be told that relate directly to the territory young people are using if not always directly to the activities themselves.

The visitor centres would attract more young people if their displays were aimed towards them but, even then, the number is likely to be few. In our experience, it is better to regard youngsters in these transition years as a potential audience once they have a wider appreciation of the world and their place in it and therefore a basis for relating with some real degree of awareness and understanding to the story of the study area. They are not a lost audience, simply one on extended leave.