

COWAL | PLACE PROFILE

This place profile brings together communities of place in an area of similar geographies, land use and local living. It sets out an introduction to the evidence we will use to inform the new Local Development Plan and covers three themes relating to the vision and chapters of the National Park Partnership Plan:

A NATURE POSITIVE PLACE
RESTORING NATURE

A CARBON NEGATIVE PLACE
CREATING A LOW CARBON PLACE

A THRIVING PLACE
DESIGNING A GREENER WAY OF LIVING



ABOUT COWAL

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DEFINING THE PLACE

This area in the west of the National Park takes in the Cowal peninsula, with the settlements of Lochgoilhead, Carrick Castle, Ardentinn, Kilmun, Strone and Blairmore stretching to the boundary of the National Park in the west, just east of Strachur and southwest just north of Dunoon, both of which sit just outside of the National Park.

Community Council wards:

- Lochgoil
- Ardentinn
- Kilmun
- Strachur

Local Authorities:

- Argyll and Bute Council

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PICTURE OF THE PLACE

A quieter but beautifully varied area of the National Park comprising of forests, hills, glens, rivers and coastline. It's home to the Argyll Forest Park and a mixture of sea and freshwater lochs with Loch Goil, Loch Long, the Holy Loch and the inland Loch Eck. It includes popular walking trails such as the Cowal and Loch Lomond Way, Benmore Botanic Gardens and Puck's Glen.

It is rich in wildlife with red squirrel, pine marten, otters, red deer and badgers being common, as well as eagles and buzzards. Marine wildlife such as harbour porpoises, seals and seabirds can also be seen here in the only coastal area of the National Park.

Cowal can be reached by road via the A83 Rest and Be Thankful, including bus services to Carrick Castle and Dunoon, or via Dunoon by taking a ferry from Gourock. Trains running from Glasgow to Gourock make this an accessible option for pedestrians and cyclists who can then pick up cycle paths or public transport in Dunoon to journey further into Cowal.

There are several communities and popular holiday or day trip destinations in Cowal, such as historic Kilmun, Benmore Garden and Puck's Glen, Lochgoilhead, Ardentinn, and Loch Eck. Some areas experience visitor pressures during the summer season.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN COWAL

NATIONAL STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE IDENTIFIED IN NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4

Cowal is home to National Infrastructure as shown in the National Park Partnership Plan, the electricity transmission line. The A83 trunk road leads to Cowal and is vitally important to the area.

Planned improvements are identified on the A83 Ardgartan to Cairndow (West Loch Lomond Area) and on upgrades to the power line from Dunoon to Loch Long.

NATIONAL PARK PARTNERSHIP PLAN DELIVERY TO BE CONSIDERED

The National Park Partnership Plan sets out to ensure nationally strategic infrastructure development is designed and delivered taking full account of the National Park's special environmental and landscape qualities, and maximises benefits to local communities, businesses and visitors.

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY IN COWAL

The recent development activity this area is experiencing is tourism, housing, electricity transmission and a marine fish farm.

In the theme **'A Thriving Place: greener economy and investing'**, the most significant planning applications for the area in recent years are listed and mapped to indicate the development activity to help illustrate how planning policies are used.



REGISTERED LOCAL PLACE PLANS TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION

LOCHGOIL PLACE PLAN 2024-2029

The community wants the place to be recognised for the positive energy of its people, the quality of its natural and cultural environment and potential for eco-tourism. It faces the challenges of a declining and ageing population and maintaining a good balance between the needs of residents and visitors. It aims to explore ways to increase affordable housing, local services/facilities and energy efficiency opportunities to enable local living. It believes in an 'infrastructure-first' approach to development with good use of vacant/derelict land. Priorities include:

- Improve connections with neighbouring villages and towns.
- Develop a diverse local economy.
- Create a flourishing local community through affordable housing, local facilities and services.
- Ensure spaces for everyone to be active and socialise.
- Nature and people will grow together to build resilience to climate change and support Net Zero.



ARDENTINN PLACE PLAN (IN DEVELOPMENT)

This Local Place Plan is being developed, and it will inform the new Local Development Plan.



KILMUN

The Kilmun community has so far decided not to prepare a place plan but will be engaged as part of the consultation on the new Local Development Plan.



STRACHUR

The Strachur Local Place Plan area overlaps with the lesser populated western edge of the Cowal area in the National Park. The Strachur community has so far decided not to prepare a place plan but will be engaged as part of the consultation on the new Local Development Plan.



A NATURE POSITIVE PLACE

UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) is our national spatial strategy for Scotland. It sets out regional priorities for this theme as follows: “Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park has landscape-scale opportunities to restore and enhance nature and respond to climate change, including through woodland creation and peatland restoration, as well as natural flood risk management.”

This is an introduction to the data and information (evidence) for A Nature Positive Place outcomes to be used in developing the new Local Development Plan.

This is to be viewed alongside *A Nature Positive Place: Issues and Opportunities*.

For more information on this theme, please go to the Topic Papers listed below:

- 1. Climate Change and Land Use
- 2. Biodiversity, Natural Places, and Forestry, Woodland and Trees
- 4. Flooding, Water Management and, Blue and Green Infrastructure

The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) Report and Map also provide more information.

LAND USE

Scotland’s Third Land Use Strategy 2021-2026 Getting the best from our land: is a useful visioning tool for what our landscapes could look like, providing illustrated examples for different areas. Land use in this area includes three of the seven illustrative landscapes: Settlements, Semi-natural land, and Coastal. The predominant landscapes are:

- › **Semi-natural land** - a wide-ranging landscape category which includes mixed farmland, forests, hills, mountains and moors, and is central to delivering how multifunctional landscapes can deliver holistically for people, climate and nature here.
- › **Coastal** - where nowhere is more than 40-50 miles away from the sea in Scotland, and our coastal communities are woven deep into the cultural fabric of our nation.

LANDSCAPE

Human activity and natural processes shape our landscapes and the distinctive landscape of Cowal and its Special Qualities are important.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The Landscape Character of the area is ‘Highland Summits’ to the north with ‘Steep Ridges and Hills’ either side of Loch Goil punctuated with ‘Upland Glens’ to the north of Lochgoilhead and at Glen Masson in the south. ‘Straths and Glens’ of Glen Finart are to the south and ‘Straths and Glens with Lochs’ at Loch Eck. ‘Settled Coastal Fringes’ are scattered and relate to the settlements around the sea lochs.

SPECIAL LANDSCAPE QUALITIES

Special qualities of the landscape in Cowal include:

- Argyll Forest**
- › A remote area of high hills and deep glens
- › A land of forests and trees
- › Arrochar’s mountainous and distinctive peaks
- › The variety of glens
- › The slender jewel of Loch Eck
- › The dramatic pass of Rest and Be Thankful
- › The seaside architecture of Kilmun and Blairmore

NATURE

DESIGNATED SITES

Nearly a fifth of our most special designated sites for nature are in decline across the National Park. This area has several sites reflecting the high nature value and potential in the area. Sites include Loch Goil, part of the Upper Loch Fyne and Loch Goil Marine Protected Area. SSSIs are at Loch Eck, Craighoyle Woodland, Hell’s Glen and Beinn an Lochain.

PRIORITY SPECIES

The area is rich in wildlife with red squirrel, pine marten, otters, red deer and badgers being common, as well as eagles and buzzards. Marine wildlife including harbour porpoises, seals and seabirds can also be seen here in the only coastal area of the National Park.

CARBON STORAGE AND EMISSIONS

Our peatlands have significant potential to store carbon, however those peatlands are currently a source of greenhouse gas emissions, as exposed and drained peatland soils actively release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and water courses. Addressing the priority areas for peatland restoration identified west and east of Lochgoil will reduce the amount of emissions, create the conditions for carbon capture, improve water quality and storage, and bring many other benefits for climate, nature and people.

Cowal is a wooded area, home to Atlantic Oak and Hazel woodlands, the Argyll Forest and other areas of native woodland and commercial forestry, which have great potential to store even greater volumes of greenhouse gases and act as carbon sinks.

WATER AND CATCHMENTS

Cowal is a landscape of coastlines, sea and freshwater lochs, with Loch Goil, Loch Long, the Holy Loch and the inland Loch Eck.

It is within the water catchments of Eachaig to the southwest, and to the east and north, and its most south westerly tip, the Cowal/ Clyde Sea lochs. The River Basin Management Plans for Scotland set out a range of actions to address significant problems affecting water quality, physical condition, water resources, and the migration of wild fish.

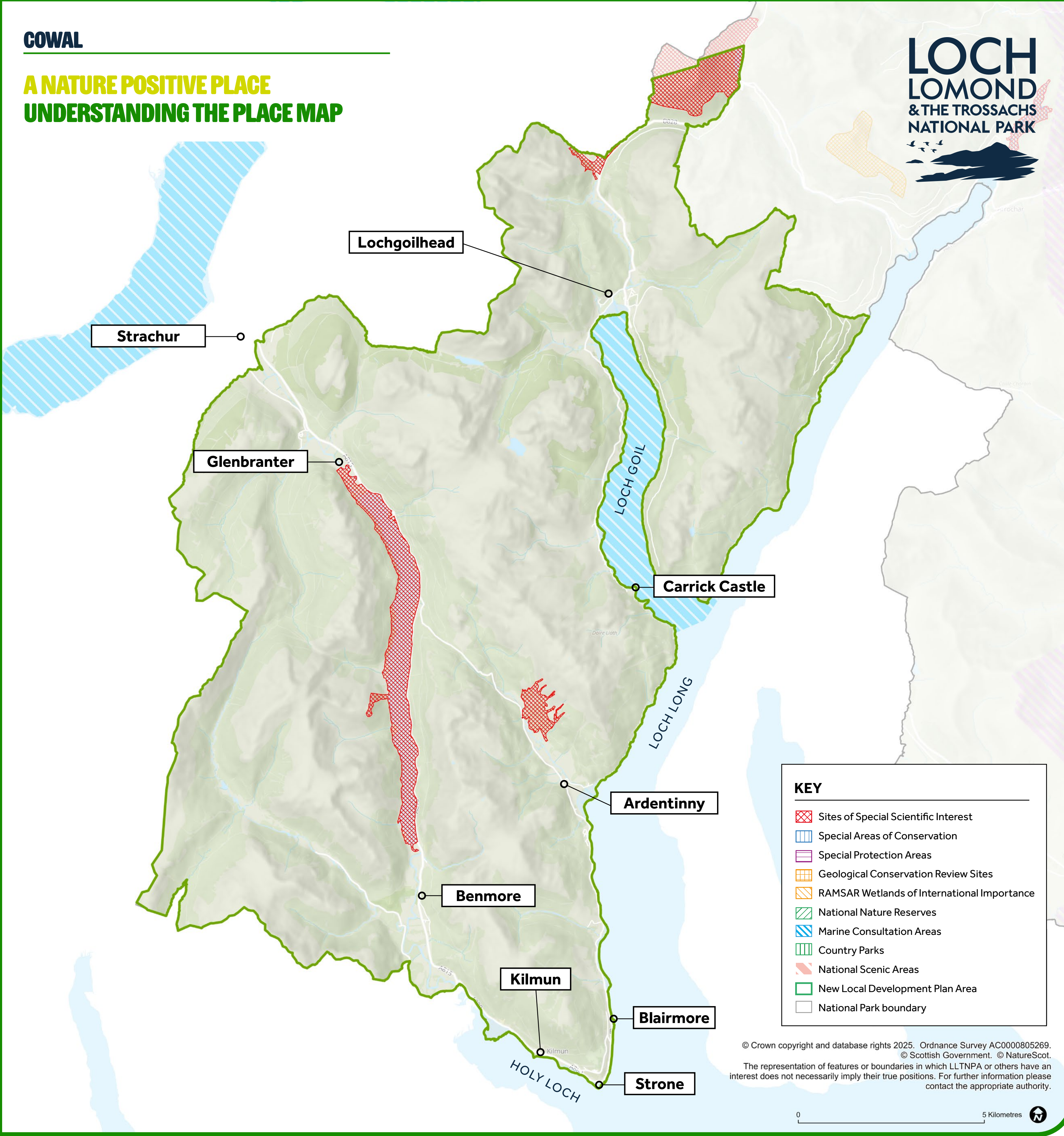
AREA BASED PLANS AND STRATEGIES

In addition to the Topic Paper and Local Place Plan references, the following information is local to Cowal:

- › Deer Management Group Plans and Count Surveys

COWAL

A NATURE POSITIVE PLACE UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE MAP



A NATURE POSITIVE PLACE

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This is an introduction to the data and information (evidence) for A Nature Positive Place outcomes to be used in developing new Local Development Plan. This is to be viewed alongside *A Nature Positive Place: Understanding the Place*.

ISSUES

CLIMATE CHANGE

The map shows climate change risks in the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park (March 2024) Climate Change Adaptation Risks and Opportunities Assessment study:

- **Lochgoilhead** – flood risk, increased precipitation, and storms.
- **Ardentinny** – flood risk, increased precipitation, and storms.
- **A815, Whistlefield** – flood risk, increased precipitation, and storms.

We will also draw on the Argyll and Bute Climate Strategy (Draft November 2024).

Areas vulnerable to flooding and coastal erosion
The Local Plan District is Clyde and Loch Lomond; this is the geographical area where flood risk management plans are used to manage flood risk.

Based on SEPA Future Flood Maps V3.0 the settlements within Cowal are vulnerable to both surface water and coastal flooding, with Carrick Castle and Lochgoilhead also vulnerable to coastal flooding. There are no community based Potentially Vulnerable Areas (2024). Potentially Vulnerable Areas are specifically defined areas where the risks to property from flooding, and the estimated average annual damages occurring as a result of flooding, are greatest.

Future coastal erosion is identified in Ardentinnny, Carrick Castle, Kilmun/Strone/Blairmore and Lochgoilhead.

INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES (INNS)

Invasive non-native species are a pressure in Cowal, this includes riparian species, and rhododendron. Rhododendron is a significant challenge in this area. Grey squirrels are currently absent from Cowal and, as Cowal hosts a core red squirrel only population, it is vitally important that this status is maintained.

HERBIVORE PRESSURES

Herbivore pressure is an issue in Cowal. To achieve objectives for habitat recovery and Nature Networks, sustainable management of herbivores is required through continued partnership working with landowners and land managers.

WATER AND WATER QUALITY

Examples of key pressures include potential aquaculture development and current marine litter/debris at Loch Long. Tackling marine litter/debris in Loch Long will likely require interconnected solutions combining cultural and technological approaches.

TREE HEALTH

Phytophthora ramorum (affecting Larch), and the resultant changes to the landscape and nature are a pressure here. The area is in the Phytophthora ramorum, Risk Reduction Zone (where spread and scale of infection is beyond what can be controlled locally with available resources). The need to fell larch trees infected with Phytophthora ramorum and reduce the risk of further spread is driving significant forest restructuring in the Cowal area.

OPPORTUNITIES

NATURAL CAPITAL APPROACH

NatureScot is leading the development of an innovative new tool that will facilitate decision makers to take a natural capital approach for managing land at the landscape scale in Scotland. The intention is that this tool will support integrated and collaborative approaches to land management and, if available, will be used within the evidence base.

NATURE NETWORK OPPORTUNITIES

The map illustrates the National Park Partnership Plan main priority areas for nature restoration efforts across three key habitat types, as part of a Nature Network approach:

- Peatland Restoration in the uplands to the north and south of Loch Goil,
- Native Woodland Restoration and expansion throughout the area, focussed on loch shore fringes and the west (avoiding peatland restoration areas) and
- Water and Wetland restoration in combination with woodland expansion at Loch Goil and between Loch Eck and Holy Loch by Kilmun.

NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT

The SEPA Natural Flood Management Maps identify areas where nature-based solutions could be most effective for sustainable flood risk management, and these are to be further investigated in conjunction with the broad scale habitat recovery priority areas in our National Park Partnership Plan. Opportunities in Cowal are mostly related to wave energy dissipation in Cowal in the National Park, focussed along the coast between Kilmun and Ardentinnny, and on towards Lochgoilhead, and at Carrick Castle and at Ardgartan, as well as run-off reduction.

FUTURE NATURE LANDSCAPE SCALE RESTORATION PROJECTS

The Future Nature Strategy is an ambitious initiative aimed at halting and reversing the decline of nature within the National Park and emphasises the importance of restoring habitats and enhancing biodiversity to create a resilient, nature-rich environment. It promotes sustainable land use practices that align with nature restoration and climate objectives.

Delivery in this area includes a Lochgoilhead community partnership project focused on The River Goil, an important spawning ground for endangered Atlantic Salmon and Sea Trout, which delivered a programme of habitat improvements, including planting hundreds of native trees to reduce bank erosion, increase biodiversity and provide shade to help regulate river temperatures.

SIGNIFICANT FORESTRY OPERATIONS OPPORTUNITIES

The early restructuring of forests affected by Phytophthora ramorum presents opportunities for native woodland restoration.

Most of the forestry in this area is owned and managed by Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS). Several Land Management Plans (LMPs) have been significantly revised to strategically plan for and accommodate felling of larch and associated facilitative felling. FLS is taking advantage of these changes to improve previous poor forest design and to significantly improve habitat connectivity and rainforest restoration with a notable increase in restocking with native broadleaves. Other notable changes in LMPs include Glen Finart where the Dunoon to Loch Long rerouted powerline will see a significant area of felling and conversion to native broadleaf woodland, as well as Cruach Benmore, where significant windblow has resulted in changes to felling proposals. There will also be significant additions to the rainforest area as the entire Loch Goil side of the Ardgartan LMP area is converted to native broadleaves.

A large-scale private commercial and native woodland creation proposal is in development on the west side of Loch Eck.

FARMING AND LAND USE

We are developing a Value of Farming and Land Use Study which will be a key source of evidence at park-wide and local level. Herbivore action planning and Regenerative Farming for Nature objectives will be key considerations.

Landownership in the area is a mix of large estates and smaller holdings under a variety of tenure options – owner occupier, tenancy, and contract farming. This area also includes a small amount of both common grazing and croft land.

The area is covered by Cowal Deer Management Group.

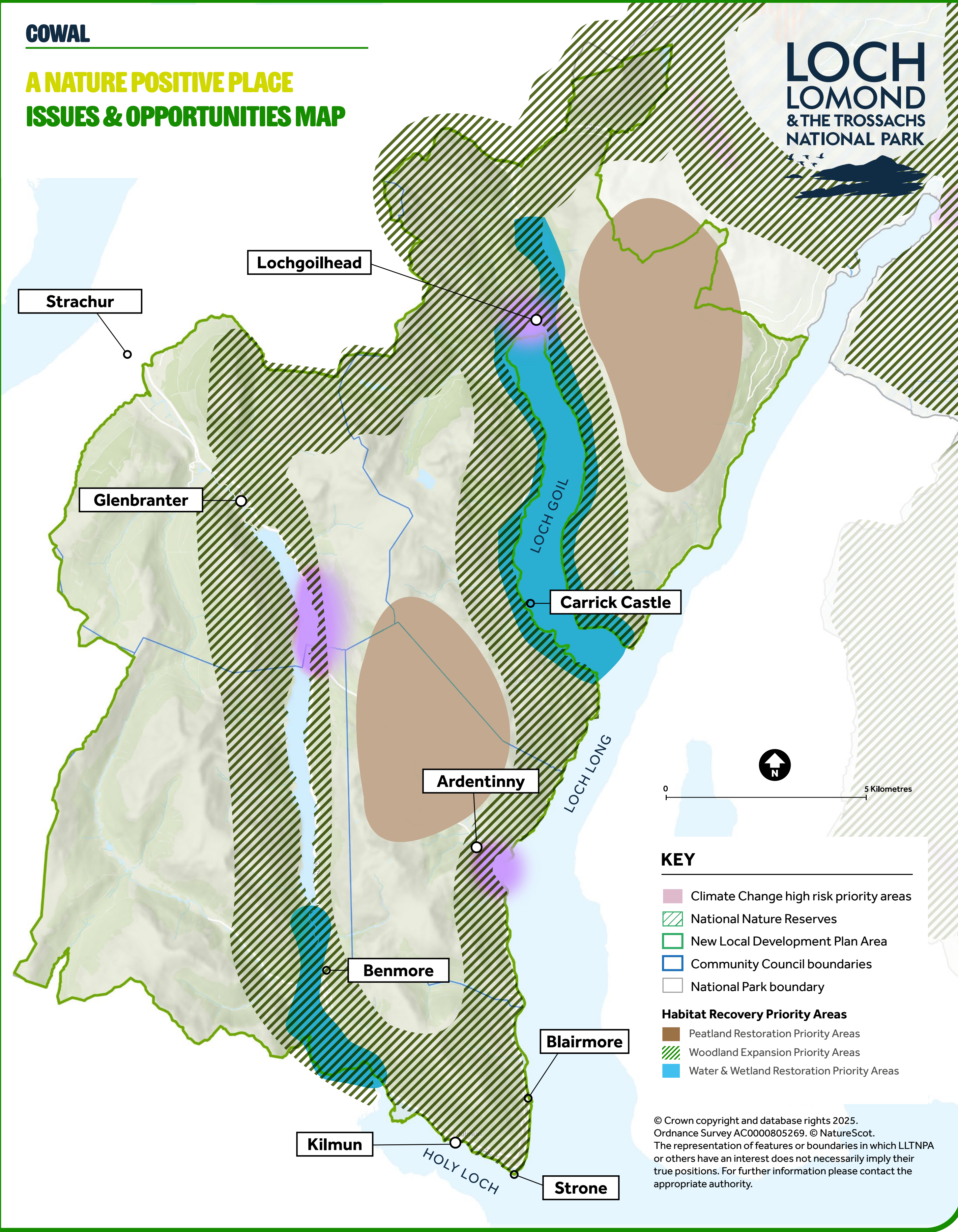
LOCAL PLACE PLANS AND RESTORING NATURE

Restoring Nature Actions within the Local Place Plans to be taken into consideration when preparing the new Local Development Plan include:

- Lochgoil Place Plan**
- Protect Dark Sky and other valuable viewpoints.
- Habitat restoration on River Goil.
- Mitigate against flood damage and extreme weather.
- Create natural, native woodland corridor.
- Explore site of seagrass plantation.
- Restore biodiversity on Ardgail Peninsula.
- Protect and value Grey Seal colony and Marine Protected Area.
- Mitigate coastal erosion.

COWAL

A NATURE POSITIVE PLACE ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES MAP



A CARBON NEGATIVE PLACE: UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) is our national spatial strategy for Scotland. It sets out regional priorities for this theme as follows: *“The National Park will continue to support the quality of life and health of the urban population and its future priorities include new infrastructure provision to provide a quality visitor experience and support people to connect with nature, as well as a greener tourism sector supported by innovative low carbon transport solutions. Long distance active travel and rail routes have untapped potential to provide sustainable tourism solutions.”*

The National Park Partnership Plan aims to support improvement of travel infrastructure, making more of the National Park accessible to all. This will be achieved through the development of sustainable and active travel options, offering a diverse range of travel choices and itineraries.

This is an introduction to the data and information (evidence) for A Carbon Negative Place outcomes to be used in developing the new Local Development Plan.

- This is to be viewed alongside *A Carbon Negative Place: Issues and Opportunities*.
- For more information on this theme, please go to the Topic Papers listed below:
- 3. Infrastructure First
 - 4. Flooding, Water Management and, Blue and Green Infrastructure
 - 6. Sustainable Transport
 - 8. Living Well Locally
 - 9. Cultural Heritage and Place
 - 10. Rural Economy

VISITOR INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT PRIORITIES AND HUBS

The map shows the Infrastructure Investment Areas in the National Park Partnership Plan, for visitor experience and to provide wider benefits to communities and businesses.

Cowal is in the Wider Park area, which covers investment priority locations outside Priority Areas. Here it contains the Secondary Hubs for visitor investment of Benmore and Lochgoilhead, and also the Primary Hub of Dunoon, outside the National Park. Infrastructure investment at visitor hubs can provide more sustainable ways for people to travel to, from and within the National Park through improved and joined up sustainable and active travel options.

The Cowal area is closely linked to Dunoon, a gateway and Primary Hub located just south of the National Park boundary. Dunoon’s links, across the Firth of Clyde to Greenock, Port Glasgow and the Central Belt and beyond, offer great potential for integrated bus, rail, cycle, and boat links.



TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT

Transport and travel connections to and from the Dunoon Primary Hub are good, however within the Cowal area connections are often lacking.

LONG DISTANCE PATH ROUTES

The Map shows the key promoted long-distance routes through the Cowal area:

- › The Loch Lomond and Cowal Way

BIKE FACILITIES

Cycle parking is available in communities and at visitor sites.

ROADS

The main A83 road is a key connection to this area and is identified in the National Park Partnership Plan as a planned improvement.

The main A815 and A880 roads pass through the area.

PUBLIC BUS AND COACH SERVICES

In the Cowal area several bus services are available

- › Pingo On-Demand Service (West Coast Motors)
- › Dunoon to Ardentinnny
- › Dunoon to Carrick Castle
- › Carrick Castle to Helensburgh

FERRY SERVICES

Vehicle and passenger ferries connections are:

- › Dunoon to Gourock (Western Ferries)
- › Dunoon to Greenock (CalMac)

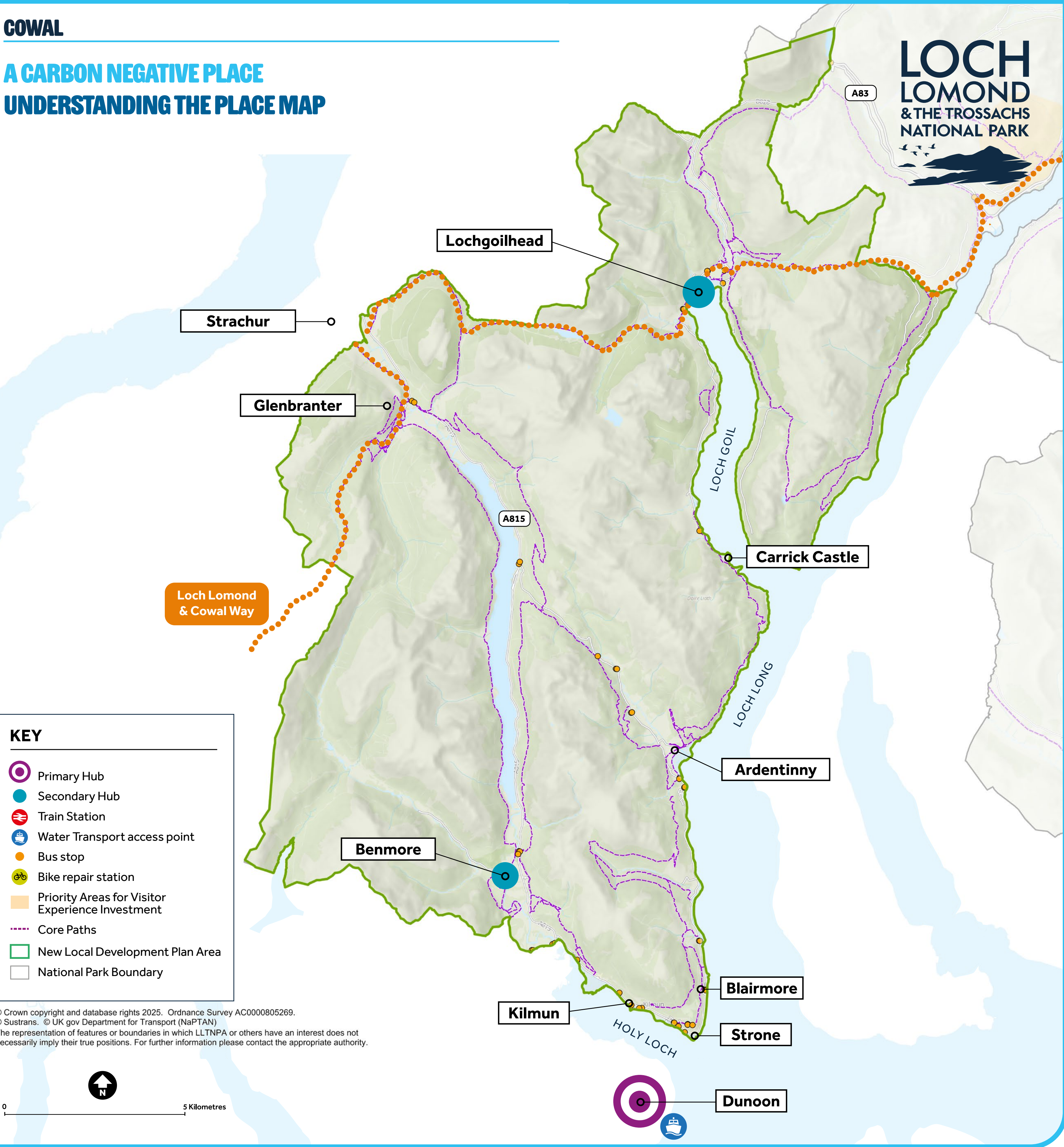
AREA BASED PLANS AND STRATEGIES

In addition to the Topic Paper and Local Place Plan references, the following information is local to Cowal:

- › Argyll and Bute Active Travel Strategy [Draft]
- › Hitrans Regional Transport Strategy [Draft]

COWAL

A CARBON NEGATIVE PLACE UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE MAP



A CARBON NEGATIVE PLACE: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This is an introduction to the data and information (evidence) for A Carbon Negative Place outcomes to be used in developing the new Local Development Plan. This is to be viewed alongside *A Carbon Negative Place: Understanding the Place*.

ISSUES

TRAFFIC

79% of visitors arrive in the National Park by car and 73% explore the area by car according to our 2019/20 Visitor Survey. An update to this evidence will be available in the coming months.

If there is no intervention, car-based travel is predicted to increase nationally by 40% by 2037. The resultant congestion and environmental impact of car travel in the National Park has an impact on communities and visitors. Throughout the National Park, the busiest traffic routes are primarily to the south and west. The A83 to access Cowal is the most heavily used road in this area.

VISITOR PRESSURE AND CONGESTION HOTSPOTS

Visitor pressures in terms of vehicles and behaviours are experienced in communities and visitor sites in the area, including the A815 road and its laybys, Jubilee Point, the Forestry and Land Scotland sites at Puck's Glen and Ardentinny, and water access points along Loch Eck being of particular note. By contrast, the Forestry and Land Scotland visitor site at Glenbranter is at times underused.

SAFE COMMUNITY ACTIVE TRAVEL AND CHALLENGES OF LOCAL LIVING

There are currently no formal cycle routes in the Cowal area.

Future road improvements on the A83 have the potential to unlock further active travel to/from adjacent West Loch Lomond.

Potential exists for active travel route improvements between Arrochar and Lochgoilhead, as well as between Lochgoilhead and Carrick Castle along with better connections to and from Dunoon.

The rural nature of the area creates challenges in living well locally, both in terms of path networks and in interconnectivity of public transport for the local population.

OPPORTUNITIES

INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES INVESTMENT

A more coordinated, connected, better designed, and managed network of visitor sites could assist rural visitor locations, local authorities, and communities to make improvements to cope with increased visitor pressure, offer enhanced visitor experiences and promote responsible tourism (land and water based), with low-carbon and nature-conscious approaches. This could reduce the impact of climate change and make it easier to manage visitor pressures, reducing the need for enforcement action.

Investment in Priority Areas and Hubs is to be delivered through the Place Programme and the Mobility Partnership.

The National Park Place Programme is a place-based multi-year programme for prioritised capital investment in visitor management infrastructure. National Park partners are working with each other, and with local and national stakeholders, to develop this programme.

The National Park Mobility Partnership Programme is designed to secure the investment, expertise and resources needed to deliver an efficient, inclusive, and lower-carbon transport system across the National Park, contributing to the overall vision of a thriving, nature-positive, and carbon negative National Park.

Opportunities for Infrastructure and Services Investment include:

- Infrastructure improvements at Place Programme agreed hubs of Benmore, Lochgoilhead and Dunoon.
- Sustainable transport strategy across the area connecting the primary hub of Dunoon with secondary hubs at Benmore and Lochgoilhead and beyond.
- Blue and green infrastructure improvements across all site infrastructure, active travel and transport developments to benefit biodiversity.
- Bus infrastructure and service improvements on the Dunoon-Benmore corridor.
- Further develop the role of Dunoon as a gateway for exploring the Cowal Peninsula.
- Maximising the potential of long-distance routes for visitors, communities and businesses.

LOCAL PLACE PLANS AND CREATING A LOW CARBON PLACE

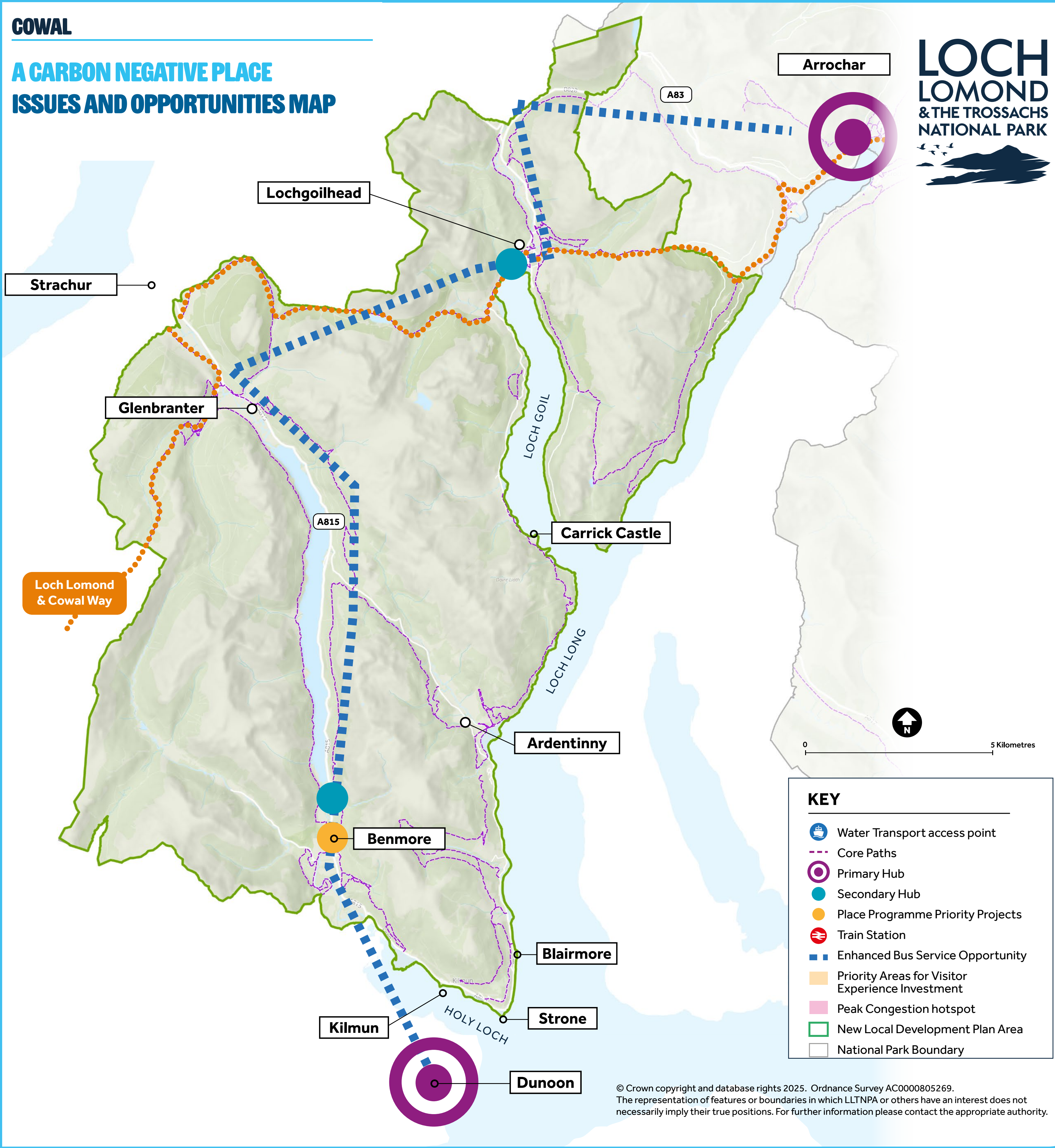
Creating a Low Carbon Place Actions within the Local Place Plans to date to be taken into consideration when preparing the new Local Development Plan include:

Lochgoil Local Place Plan 2024-2029

- Off-road cycling routes
- Path routes and connections
- Water transport and infrastructure (Carrick Jetty)
- Camping facilities, toilet facilities in Lochgoilhead and Carrick Castle
- Community space and seawall by Shorehouse Hotel

COWAL

A CARBON NEGATIVE PLACE ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES MAP



A THRIVING PLACE: COMMUNITY AND LOCAL LIVING

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) is our national spatial strategy for Scotland. It sets out regional priorities for this theme as follows: *“The area’s communities can adapt to support more localised living and working opportunities, with improved digital connectivity and affordable housing. More integrated planning and land management offers opportunities to support land use change and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.”*

This is an introduction to the data and information (evidence) for *A Thriving Place: community and local living* outcomes to be used in developing the new Local Development Plan.

This is to be viewed alongside *A Thriving Place: greener economy and investing*. For more information on this theme, please go to the Topic Papers listed below:

2. Biodiversity, Natural Places, and Forestry, Woodland and Trees

3. Infrastructure First

4. Flooding, Water Management and, Blue and Green Infrastructure

5. Energy and Heat and Cooling

6. Sustainable Transport

7. Housing

8. Living Well Locally

9. Cultural Heritage and Place

10. Rural Economy

The Play Sufficiency Assessment also provides more information.

LIVING WELL LOCALLY

The map shows the town and village communities within this area with their local living facilities. This information can be built on to develop strategies for planning for ‘Living Well Locally’; an approach similar to 20-minute neighbourhoods but for the rural context.

Cowal is geographically isolated, with residents traveling both north (Arrochar/Tarbet/Helensburgh) and south (Dunoon) for essential services. This area lacks a central hub community but has a strong history of local collaboration. There is a need for greater cooperation among land managers, particularly between Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS), local communities, and upland farms. The area faces shared challenges, including population decline and housing pressure.

LOCHGOILHEAD

Lochgoilhead offers some local living services including food shopping, early years nursery and a primary school. Lochgoilhead is a popular visitor destination with Drimsynie Holiday Village located here. Connections for a wider range of services are located in Arrochar or Dunoon.

ARDENTINNY

Ardentinny offers some local living services with the nearest food shopping and primary school located in Kilmun, Strone and Blairmore or slightly further and outwith the National Park boundary, at Dunoon, which provides a larger range of services for living well locally.

KILMUN, STRONE AND BLAIRMORE

Collectively Kilmun, Strone and Blairmore offer a small selection of local living services, with nearby Dunoon providing a larger selection of services.

DUNOON (OUTWITH THE NATIONAL PARK BOUNDARY)

Although Dunoon is outside the National Park, it serves as a primary hub for the Cowal area with transport links for the community and visitors. It also provides local services such as a secondary school, groceries and amenities.

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING - COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Community wealth building is a specific policy within NPF4 (Policy 25) which aims to ensure that local economic development focuses on community and place benefits as a central and primary consideration with reference to supporting community ownership and management of buildings and land. Its policy intent is to encourage and promote a new strategic approach to economic development that provides a practical model for building a wellbeing economy at local, regional and national level. Community-run services are not covered in this profile.

Community assets here are the hydro schemes in Lochgoilhead and Ardentinny, Lochgoilhead community garden, Cormonachan woodland, Glenfinart Walled Garden, Kilmun church and mausoleum, and the village halls.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

GARDENS AND DESIGNED LANDSCAPES

The Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes site in this area is Benmore (Younger Botanic Garden). Other historic designed landscapes include Drimsynie and Glenfinart.

BUILDINGS AT RISK REGISTER

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) prepared a summary report on the 2022 Buildings at Risk Register (BARR) survey conducted in the National Park. There are a number of identified buildings at risk in this area, including Carrick Castle Church and Glenfinart House, Ardentinny, and a number along the southern coast near Kilmun, Strone and Blairmore.

LOCAL PLACE PLANS AND A THRIVING PLACE

A Thriving Place actions within the Local Place Plans to date to be taken into consideration when preparing the new Local Development Plan include:

LOCHGOIL LOCAL PLACE PLAN 2024-2029:

- › Co-working space
- › Local business storage/workshop
- › Community food growing space
- › Secure future of village hall
- › Community asset ownership
- › Enhance playpark and Arboretum
- › Carry forward LDP 1 housing site allocation (Lochgoilhead)

AREA BASED PLANS AND STRATEGIES

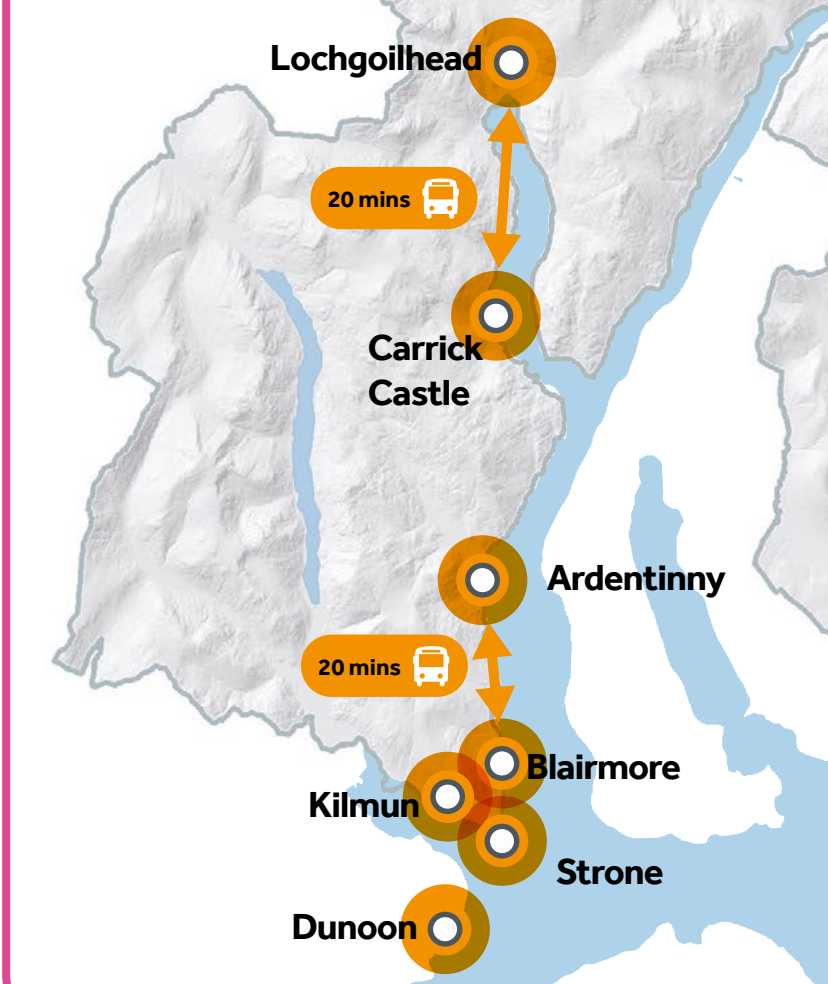
In addition to the Topic Paper references, the following information is local to Cowal:

- › Local Place Plan Profiles and Data Packs

COWAL

A THRIVING PLACE COMMUNITY AND LOCAL LIVING MAP

LIVING WELL LOCALLY POTENTIAL

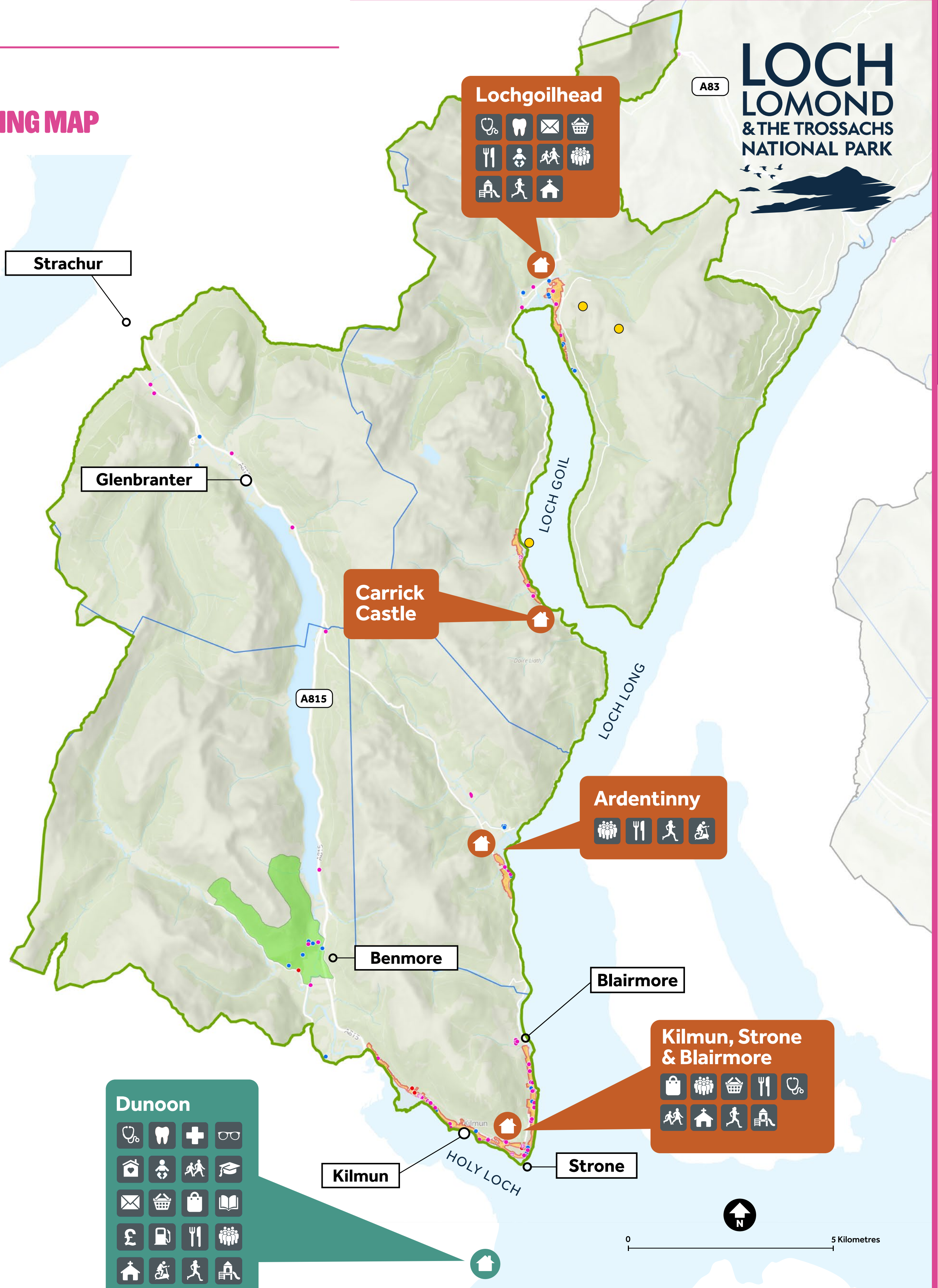


KEY

- Ancient scheduled monuments
- Gardens & designed landscapes
- Conservation Area
- Listed Buildings:
 - Category A
 - Category B
 - Category C
- Settlement boundaries
- New Local Development Plan area
- Community Council boundaries
- National Park boundary

- Small Rural community
- Village
- Town

Nursery	Optician
Primary School	Place of Worship
Secondary School	Bank
Community	Library
Indoor Leisure	Food Shopping
Play Park	Convenience Store
Outdoor Leisure	Post Office
GP Surgery	Restaurant/Pub
Chemist	Petrol Station
Dentist	Sheltered Housing



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A THRIVING PLACE: GREENER ECONOMY AND INVESTING

This is an introduction to the data and information (evidence) for A Thriving Place: greener economy and investing outcomes to be used in developing the new Local Development Plan. This is to be viewed alongside *A Thriving Place: community and local living*.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

This map highlights the key areas in the National Park for strategic development priorities, planned infrastructure improvements and core infrastructure. Through its planning role the National Park Authority can proactively guide new development and infrastructure within the National Park that is more closely aligned to deliver for climate and nature, while also meeting the needs of those living and working here. Nature recovery can be secured through identifying opportunities for investment in natural capital, strengthening nature networks and enhancing biodiversity on site as part of development delivery.

RURAL ECONOMY

The goal is for new development and infrastructure to be more responsive to the needs of communities, the rural economy, land use and management, directly benefiting people, climate and nature.

HOUSING

The Housing Authority in this area is Argyll and Bute Council.

As a Planning Authority, we play an active role in supporting the delivery of rural housing within the National Park through our Local Development Plan (LDP). Monitoring shows significant challenges to delivering affordable and sustainable housing:

- › constraints on land supply and suitable development sites
- › a lack of infrastructure and essential services
- › high development costs
- › high property prices driven by external pressures

Ownership dominates the housing market, creating affordability challenges for lower-income households. The private rented sector is limited and often unaffordable, while social housing availability is low, with high demand and long waiting lists.

In this area the housing market is under pressure, with high prices, an ageing population, and a shortage of affordable housing due to the prevalence of second homes and short-term lets. Cowal has a higher proportion of second homes (17%) compared with 5% Park-wide.

NATURE TOURISM SITES

Benmore Botanic Garden

This renowned garden is part of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and features towering Redwood trees, rare plants from around the world, and scenic trails through Scotland's Rainforest. Hides offer ideal spots to watch out for wildlife, and a walk through Benmore can bring close encounters with red squirrels, sparrowhawks and the occasional golden eagle.

Puck's Glen

Known for its magical rainforest-like atmosphere, Puck's Glen is part of Scotland's Rainforest and features cascading waterfalls and dense woodland with ferns, lichens, and conifers. The humid conditions support a rich diversity of plant life, including rare mosses and fungi, and unique wildlife, such as red squirrels, pine martens, and various woodland birds, thrive in this sheltered environment. Puck's Glen is not open to the public during 2025 owing to extensive storm damage.

Cormonachan Community Woodlands

Located on the west shore of Loch Goil between Lochgoilhead and Carrick Castle, this woodland is part of Scotland's Rainforest and is preserved for conservation, education, and recreation. It features 300-year-old oaks and 100-year-old coppiced hazels, and the woodlands are rich in flora and fungi in autumn. It is a key site for viewing prime wildlife species including red squirrels and pine martens.

SUPPORTING JOBS AND SKILLS

The economy in the National Park is dominated by the accommodation, hospitality and retail sector, however land-based employment, construction and public service employment (care, education) also make up a big part of the economy.

In Cowal, the economy is driven by tourism, particularly caravan parks. The primary employment hub is Lochgoilhead, along with Dunoon outside the Park boundary.

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY

The predominantly rural nature of the area poses issues to broadband access. Data shows that there are large areas that have limited access or are unable to access broadband however most are not where people live. A high proportion of the villages and towns where people live receive broadband.

The areas that have limited mobile network coverage include Carrick Castle and large parts of the surrounding Cowal peninsula.

VACANT AND DERELICT AND UNDERDEVELOPED LAND

There is a small area of vacant and derelict land at a former hotel site in Carrick Castle (0.53 ha). It has been vacant since 2001-2004.

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY - PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The recent development activity this area is experiencing is tourism, housing, electricity transmission and a marine fish farm.

Listed below are the most significant planning applications for the area in recent years to indicate the development activity to help illustrate how planning policies are used.

PRE 2020/0095: Electricity Transmission Networks From Whistlefield To Dunoon – Replacement of Overhead Line. Consultation to National Park from the Energy Consents Unit of Scottish Government. No decision issued to date.

2021/0357/DET: Beinn Reithe, Loch Long - Installation of marine fish farm. Refused by NPA and then appealed by applicant. Awaiting decision from Scottish Government.

2022/0241/DET: Pier Hotel, Kilmun - Change in the use of hotel (Class 7) to form 4 no. flats. Approved August 2023.

2022/0294/DET: Blairmore Village Hall, Blairmore – Erection of 3 holiday let cabins, new car park and paths and renovation of village hall. Currently under consideration.

023/0035/DET: Land at Carrick Castle – erection of three houses. Approved – commuted sum towards affordable housing required.

2025/0039/DET: Blairmore Farm, Blairmore - Erection of 6 no. lodges (for holiday use) and formation of access road. Currently under consideration

Wind farm development activity adjacent to Cowal
Creag Dhuhb 9 turbines max height of 145m turbines, 5-6km track, substation and 2 borrow pits. Consented by Argyll & Bute Council but not started.

Ladyfield 19 turbines max height 180m, tracks and battery storage Still to be determined by Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit

Giant's Burn 9 turbines up to 200m in height. Infrastructure and Battery energy storage At scoping

Inverchaolin up to 13 turbines 200m height. Infrastructure and battery storage. At scoping

COWAL

A THRIVING PLACE GREENER ECONOMY AND INVESTING MAP

