



REGIONAL PARKS IN SCOTLAND

A Review



**Scottish Campaign for National Parks
and
Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland**

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DRAFT

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This review of the regional parks in Scotland was carried out during the summer of 2018 and aims to summarise their history, review their operation over the past 40 years and suggest what the future may hold.
- 1.2 The three regional parks in Scotland were established through the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 and modified by the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981. (See Appendix 1). Their origins can be traced back to the work of the then Countryside Commission for Scotland (CCS), although there had been calls for types of rural parks near cities in Scotland before that time, notably in the famous 1947 Abecrombie Clyde Valley Regional Plan where a first regional park was described and proposed for Craigend, north of Glasgow.
- 1.3 The seminal document which defined the role of Regional Parks was *A Park System for Scotland* published in 1974 by the CCS which proposed a hierarchy of parks to provide for recreation and access as follows: (see also Appendix 2)

Urban Parks — These are long-standing in most towns and cities, but in the past have seldom been linked positively in strategic terms with countryside provisions. This link was seen as essential in future.

Country Parks — The Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 provides the statutory authority for country parks. According to the 1967 Act ... *A country park is a park or pleasure ground in the countryside which by reason of its position in relation to major concentrations of population affords convenient opportunities to the public for enjoyment of the countryside or open-air recreation.* Designation and management is by district or regional authorities, singly or jointly.

Regional Parks — These could be some thousands of hectares in area, with recreation as the dominant use in parts only. The areas within a regional park which would be intensively used for recreation would be linked together by footpaths, with a view to reducing pressure on areas of sensitive farming and forestry interests. Regional parks can be designated by the regional authorities in consultation with the CCS and subject to the approval of central government, and generally they will be managed by the regional authorities with funding support from central government.

Special Parks* — Special Parks would be areas already under substantial recreational pressure and having particular attributes of scenic character which give them a national rather than a regional or local significance. This national significance would justify the involvement of some national input into decisions affecting their management and development. The CCS proposed, therefore, that there should be a separate park authority for each Special Park, with two-thirds of the members appointed by the existing local authorities and one-third by central government to represent the scenic, recreational, scientific and other important aspects of the park. The Commission recommended that the park authorities should have local planning powers and a very high proportion of the finance for capital works and running costs would be provided by central government, on whom would rest responsibility for designation.

*These were proposed "National Parks" in all but name.

- 1.4 The CCS published a policy for regional parks in January 1982 and some sections of that statement are reproduced here to illustrate what was envisaged at that time:

Regional parks are intended to provide a comprehensive system of public access to countryside, ranging from areas of nil or low recreational use to sites used intensively, including picnic sites and possibly one or more country parks, and linked by footpaths or wider areas over which access agreements could be negotiated. Because of the diversity of land use and their size, such parks cannot be regarded as being merely large country parks'.....

In regional parks, the amount of land given over primarily to recreation will generally be quite a small proportion of the total area and other main land uses will be farming, forestry, water catchment or field sports or, more probably, some combination of these. Normally the Commission would not expect the area of a settlement to be included within the boundary of a park.....

The function of regional parks would therefore be seen as providing an opportunity for the co-ordinated management of recreational provision alongside and in close collaboration with the management of other land uses throughout the park. In this way, by giving overall regional park identity and purpose to recreational provision and management, the existence of a regional park should be of mutual benefit to the other land users as well as to the public seeking informal recreation in the countryside.....

The most effective way of ensuring the mutual compatibility of policies for the disposal of planning applications will be the adoption of a policy plan for each regional park, prepared in consultation with the advisory committee and approved by all planning authorities having responsibilities for the areas of the park. Consideration should be given to the inclusion of the principal policies so produced in the relevant local or local (subject) plan and account of this should be taken in the structure plan concerned. It is recommended that such a policy plan should be concerned primarily with the formulation of integrated policies for the park as a whole, both in its wider setting and as regards its major land uses as these relate to specific parts of the park. The preparation of detailed management plans for particular parts of the park should follow adoption of the policy plan and should not form part of it.

- 1.5 Four regional parks were established in the central belt of Scotland providing a regional park within one hour's drive of 70% of the Scottish population. The Loch Lomond Regional Park became part of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park in 2002. All the parks had relatively wild upland country which provided a range of outdoor recreational opportunities in fine landscape settings. The regional parks today are:

• Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park	108 sq miles
• Lomond Hills Regional Park	25 sq miles
• Pentland Hills Regional Park	35 sq miles
TOTAL	168 sq miles (0.5% of the Scottish land area)

- 1.6 Within these regional parks there are five country parks where there is more concentrated provision for outdoor recreation. This is very much in line with what was envisaged when the regional parks were first proposed in the early 1980s.

- Castle Semple Loch and Muirshiel Country Parks are within the Clyde Muirshiel RP
- Lochore Meadows Country Park is within the Lomond Hills Regional Park, and

- Hillend and Bonally Country Parks are within the Pentland Hills Regional Park

1.7 The early years of the regional parks in Scotland were marked by optimism and investment, the recent years can best be described as ones of retrenchment and dwindling resources, reducing staff numbers and lack of investment.

1.8 The CCS played a significant role in supporting the Regional Councils with the staffing of the Regional Parks, particularly through grant aiding the local authorities to support the ranger services. This grant aid continued when CCS became part of the new Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in 1992 and a policy statement about the Regional Parks was produced by SNH in 1994 aimed at raising their profile.

1.9 When new access legislation was introduced in Scotland in 2003 the regional parks were re-confirmed by SNH, but the direct funding of countryside staff was ended in 2005/6 when at the direction of the Scottish Government the countryside grants from SNH of some £4.5 million per annum went straight to the local authorities in Scotland and did not necessarily have to be used to support ranger and other countryside services.

1.10 In 2012 SNH produced an important policy paper entitled “Parks and Reserves - Places Managed for People and Nature”. The regional parks were one of these key areas and national priorities were identified as follows:

- *To maximise the use and enjoyment of parks and reserves through better promotion and marketing*
- *To increase the use of parks and reserves by developing initiatives to encourage more physical activity and experience of nature through outdoor recreation, volunteering and learning*
- *To improve management for people and nature by developing and demonstrating best practice in visitor and heritage management*
- *To maintain the range of existing provision, exploring new sources of funding, ownership and management where needed*
- *To develop the contribution of parks and reserves to multi-functional green networks and open space strategies, and*
- *To identify and keep under review priorities for provision to meet current and future needs.*

1.11 The 2012 SNH document gives continued support to the role of the three regional parks and even suggests a fourth Regional Park could be created:

Their administrative structure, and the availability of ranger services, means that the (regional parks) are also very well placed to work with and support groups who are new to outdoor recreation. Their main limitations are the relatively low recognition of the regional park brand and the vulnerability of their partnership funding arrangements which, in two of the three parks, involve more than one local authority. However, the mechanism seems to have continued relevance, as suggested by the consideration of a new Regional Park in the Campsies.

- 1.12 The SNH policy statement also identified the important role for the new Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN). It's potential relationship to the regional parks is explored later in this paper.
- 1.13 In 2014 Christine Grahame MSP unsuccessfully sought to extend the Pentland Hills Regional Park into the Borders through a Private Member's Bill in the Scottish Parliament.

2 Staffing and Budgets of the Regional Parks

- 2.1 The early regional parks had adequate staff resources, illustrated by the staffing of the **Fife (Lomond Hills) Regional Park** with Lochore Meadows Country Park which in 1987 had some 25 staff with a Regional Park Manager, Depute Manager, a ranger staff of 6 plus 8 maintenance staff.
- 2.2 In the **Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park** there was a staff of 40 full-time equivalents (fte) as late as 2010 with sections dealing with estates, rangers, activity team and visitor centres, with an administration section and senior management team. The annual revenue budget for the regional park in the 2010 – 2013 period was about £1.3 million per annum, but from 2006 the grant funding for the ranger service from SNH had ended, putting increased pressure on the local authorities. The budget in 2016/17 was down to £1.07 million - a reduction of around 35% in four years when inflation is factored in. Further reductions are proposed for 2018/19 will reduce the budget to around £600,000 pa and the employment of a park manager is now in doubt.
- 2.3 In recent years staffing for the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park has fallen steadily from 38 fte in 2013 to 30 in 2016 (Annual Report 2016/17). The front-line ranger staff numbers fell from 10.5 fte to 7 fte in that period – a reduction of one third.
- 2.4 During this same period the use of the park has continued to increase and the latest figures from 2016/17 estimate that just short of 700,000 visits were made to the park with around half of those being to the Castle Semple Loch Country Park.
- 2.5 The **Pentland Hills Regional Park** had turnover in the 2006 – 2010 period of around £380,000 pa with grant aid from the CCS/SNH of around £85,000 pa. and the park employed 9 staff. By 2015, with the withdrawal of SNH grant aid funding, the turnover was down to £340,000 and today is reduced to £330,000 per annum (equivalent to a 40% reduction over that past 8 years) with only a part-time park manager and 2 full-time and 2 part-time rangers boosted by a volunteer ranger compliment.
- 2.6 Possibly the most attractive of the regional parks – that in Loch Lomond - was converted to a new National Park in 2002 and became part of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.

3. Management Structures

- 3.1 All three regional parks established joint advisory committees with representatives of local landowners and interested organisations, as well as elected members from their constituent local authorities.

- 3.2 In the Pentland Hills, for example, there is a Joint Committee of around 10 elected members from the three local authorities plus representatives of the major public sector landowner in the area - Scottish Water and SNH. It is chaired by an elected member from Edinburgh City Council, the lead authority. There is also a Consultative Forum which meets twice per annum with landowner and interest groups represented and there is a small Management Group where the staff and SNH and Scottish Water.
- 3.3 The Lomond Hills also had an advisory committee with landowners and staff of the Fife Council meeting regularly. Some landowners in the park area opposed the idea of a regional park and would not cooperate. The advisory committee has unfortunately ceased to meet since 2016 as the park budgets and staff have reduced. The management of the park has passed to the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust. A successful HLF funded landscape partnership project recently improved some facilities but did not lead to a revival of the regional park committee.
- 3.4 The Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park was first designated in 1990 and with the demise of the Regional Councils in 1996 became the Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority with a Joint Management Committee of the three local authorities of Inverclyde, North Ayrshire and Renfrewshire (the lead authority).
- 3.5 When 5 farms in the park were owned by North Ayrshire Council farm plans were produced for these but when the council disposed of the farms the direct involvement of the park authority ceased.

4. Voluntary Groups in the Regional Parks

- 4.1 Volunteer Groups developed in time for the Regional Parks showing their support for the concept. They fall in to two main categories – those that focused on carrying out voluntary conservation work and those that saw their role in protecting the new parks from unwanted development.
- 4.2 The Friends of the Pentlands first met in 2003. In 2017 it had 385 members and a bank balance of some £18,500 with a range of successful projects completed and grant aid funds attracted. The role of the Friends of the Pentlands in the future is possibly becoming more significant as the local authority staff numbers decrease.
- 4.3 In the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park volunteer opportunities are organised by the Regional Park staff and with the cut backs in staff this input is restricting what can be managed. Helping at one of the three visitor centres is one of the valuable tasks carried out by volunteers. Strong opposition to new wind farm proposals in the Regional Park has been organised by a group of local residents.
- 4.5 It has been suggested by some that a future model for a regional park could be to establish a charitable trust which would employ the staff, could own land and buildings and have a strong volunteer input, but this approach has not met with sufficient support to be progressed, with some feeling that such an organisation would be less secure than one managed directly by the local authorities. In England and Wales some of the Areas of

Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) have established charitable trusts to help raise money and carry out projects. One such example is the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust and the Arnside Silverdale AONB has established a landscape trust that now has over 1000 paying members.

5. Use of the Regional Parks

- 5.1 Visitor numbers to the three Regional Parks are estimated today to be at least 2 million visits per annum. The latest visitor survey estimates for each park are as follows:

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park	694,000	(2016/17)
Pentland Hills Regional Park	515,000	(2006/7)
Lomond Hills Regional Park	682,500	(2009)
TOTAL	1,891,000	

In comparison, the most visited free attractions in Scotland in 2016 were:

The National Museum of Scotland	1,811,000
Scottish National Gallery	1,544,000
Loch Lomond Shores	1,317,000
Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery	1,260,000
Riverside Museum, Glasgow	1,259,000
St Giles' Cathedral	1,172,000
Gretna Green Blacksmith's shop	795,000
Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh	790,000
National War Museum, Edinburgh	679,000
Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh	647,000

- 5.2 The above data illustrate the significant appeal of the three regional parks in Scotland, which collectively attract more visitors than any of the free attractions in Scotland and individually are visited by numbers comparable with nationally renowned sites such as the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh or the Gretna Green Blacksmiths shop.
- 5.3 By far the largest number of visitors use the country parks within each regional park, with the hill areas providing space and a less crowded recreational experience – as was intended when the parks were established. Nevertheless, some parts of each of the regional parks are very popular with walkers, such as the hill ridge of the Pentlands and the East and West Lomond hills.
- 5.4 Visitor surveys in the regional parks have consistently recorded a high level of satisfaction from the users on site and with a strong use by very local residents. Visitors from Glasgow for instance constituted only 9% of the 516 people surveyed at four main sites in a 2013 Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park visitor survey and only 2% of the users had arrived by bus or train. The park was not attracting significant numbers of visitors from the Glasgow conurbation – possibly due to the lack of direct public transport.
- 5.5 A 2014 visitor survey in the Pentland Hills Regional Park illustrated that over 80% of the visitors were from Edinburgh, but with a strong under representation from the most deprived areas of the city – probably partly because of a lack of access to a car. The survey

also illustrated that many were regular visitors to the park, with 86% coming at least once per month. All age groups were represented but with an increase in use with age. People under 25 were not using the regional park in great numbers (although the Hillend ski centre would show a very different picture).

- 5.6 A 2009 Visitor Survey in the Lomond Hills Regional Park illustrated again the under representation of the less well-off members of the population with only 7% of the users interviewed being from the lower socio-economic groups DE, although 57% were from C1 and C2 groups with 22% from the AB groups. 76% of the users were Fife residents with 51% using the park at least once a month. 70% of those interviewed stated that they valued the regional park designation whilst 24% were unaware of the designation.
- 5.7 Whilst the regional parks are popular there is evidence that those without access to a car and/or are from poorer socio-economic families are not using the parks in the numbers that many would like. The contribution that the parks can make to issues of physical and mental health could be strengthened, but this will require resources and better transport options.

6. Regional Park Plans

Pentlands

- 6.1 Initially the Pentland Hills Regional Park was operated by Lothian Regional Council who prepared a Subject Local Plan to guide the park's policies and management. Following local government re-organisation in 1997, Lothian Regional Council was disbanded and its functions superseded by the three unitary local authorities comprising the City of Edinburgh Council, Midlothian Council and West Lothian Council. The policies relevant to the Pentland Hills Regional Park contained within the former Lothian Regional Council's Subject Local Plan were then incorporated into the local plans of the respective three new unitary authorities.
- 6.2 In September 2007 the Pentlands Hills Regional Park Plan 2007-2017 was published and covers five themes
- Responsible Enjoyment and Understanding of the Hills
 - The Local Economy of the Hills
 - Conservation and Enhancement of the Landscape, Natural and Cultural Heritage
 - Partnership and Participation
 - Managing the Pentland Hills Regional Park Plan

Under these five themes a whole series of objectives, actions and monitoring are contained within the plan.

Clyde Muirshiel

- 6.3 The initial Clyde Muirshiel Country Park covered about 12,500 ha and was established in 1970 and the full regional park of double that size was declared in 1990. In 1996 the Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority came in to being and a joint authority of Inverclyde, North Ayrshire and Renfrewshire Councils worked together. A park strategy was prepared and covered recreation and access, biodiversity, education and understanding, landscape and built heritage, tourism and management.

- 6.4 Recreational and educational facilities were developed at Barnbrock, Castle Semple, Muirshiel, Greenock Cut (Cornalees) and Lunderston Bay. Grant aid from CCS/SNH was important as were European Development funds.
- 6.5 Renfrewshire Council, Inverclyde Council and North Ayrshire Council established a Joint Committee - referred to as “the Park Authority” for the Regional Park in 1996 to discharge the relative functions in relation to tourism, recreation and conservation across the park area. The Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park Authority manages sites at Muirshiel, Greenock Cut, Lunderston Bay, Barnbrock and Castle Semple. The latest Regional Park Strategy 2016 – 2021 covers three main areas, identifying objectives and actions for each. The areas are:
- Leisure Activity and Health
 - Education and Outdoor Learning
 - Environmental Management

Threats to the park landscape

- 6.6 The recent development of most concern has been the granting of planning permission for new wind turbines. This is not an issue confined to the regional parks in Scotland.

“Construction and approval for 26 turbines in the Park at three sites all in the area south of the A760 and between Fairlie and Dalry, in addition to the 15 turbines north of Ardrossan has significantly changed the landscape character, diminished the wild-land qualities and impacted on the habitats and species of this part of the Regional Park. Further large-scale developments are being driven forward north of the A760, each having its own set of impacts on the qualities of the Regional Park”

Park Strategy 2008 – 2011, Extension to 2012.

- 6.7 In 2009 a Parliamentary Petition considered the threat to the regional parks from wind farm proposals – see Appendix 3. But further applications were subsequently approved. It appears that the Scottish Government does not afford the same protection to the landscape of the three regional parks as it does to the two national parks in Scotland.

Lomond Hills

- 6.8 Originally named the Fife Regional Park when it was established in 1986 it was re-named Lomond Hills Regional Park in 2003. The park was declared in recognition of the extensive use of the land within its boundary for informal countryside recreation by local communities and visitors to the area. The Lomond Hills Regional Park Partnership was created in 2001 and is a working partnership of landowners, estate managers, farmers, public sector agencies, individuals and organisations that have an interest in the recreational use and its impact on the day to day life, of the land within and adjacent to the Park boundary.
- 6.9 The Regional Park does not now have its own staff with visitor services and countryside management being delivered by the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust’s Ranger and Maintenance teams.
- 6.10 For a number of years there was a unique arrangement with local land managers/farmers. These land managers received annual grants from Fife Council to provide a welcome to

visitors and to share their experience of working and living in the hills and to carry out some maintenance tasks. Not all landowners participated and this arrangement has now ceased.

- 6.10 A Development Plan for the Lochore Meadows Country Park was prepared in 2008 but there remains no regional park plan.
- 6.11 A visitor survey in 2009 estimated that some 682,500 visits were made to the Lomond Hills Regional Park with around 530,000 of these being to the Lochore Meadows Country Park and 152,500 being to the Lomond Hills.

7. Changes Since Regional Parks Were Established

- 7.1 Scotland is a different place than it was 40 years ago when the regional parks were conceived and there have been a number of changes that point to the need to review and re-assess the role of the regional parks. The reduction in the funding available from the local authorities to support the regional park core staff and services in recent years makes such a review even more urgent.
- 7.2 Some of the most important changes can be summarised as:
- a) Continued pressure on the countryside for development, particularly for housing and for wind power generation:
 - Wind turbines can now be viewed from almost 50% of the land area of Scotland according to research by the John Muir Trust and the University of Leeds
 - b) Continued loss of biodiversity and the need for positive habitat management and protection:
 - There is an increasing realisation of the value of “natural capital” and “ecosystem services” which show that the importance of natural habitat has been greatly under-estimated in the past.
 - c) Increased population:
 - Scotland’s population today of 5.4 million is 7% greater than it was in 1981
 - d) Increased car ownership, but with a significant minority with no car:
 - Cars licensed in Scotland have almost doubled since 1980 to nearly 3 million vehicles, although 30% of households do not have access to a car
 - e) Increased numbers of older people in the population:
 - In 2016 18% of the Scottish population were 65 or over
 - f) Rise in obesity and other poor health condition partly associated with more sedentary life styles and partly as a result of the increase in life expectancy: (see Appendix 5)
 - In 2016, 65% of the Scottish population was over-weight or obese
 - The rise in Type 2 diabetes is a national issue of great concern

- g) The rise in awareness of mental health issues in both younger and older people in Scotland and the proven value of outdoor experiences to help tackle these issues.
 - h) The establishment of some 40 Country Parks in Scotland with the addition of two new National Parks under legislation passed in 2000
 - i) New access legislation in Scotland permitting further access to hill land together with an increase in the realisation of the importance of wild land, particularly close to where people live.
- 7.3 These trends point to the importance of the regional parks in protecting and enhancing the landscape and natural habitats in the central belt of Scotland and to provide and promote opportunities for active outdoor recreation which contributes to tackling the obesity crisis and to health and well-being generally.

8. The Main Issues Facing the Regional Parks Today

- 8.1 Today the three Regional Parks in Scotland are at a cross roads as a result of the withdrawal of national funding support from SNH in 2009 and the squeeze on local authority budgets. Regional parks were conceived at a time when the Scottish Regional Councils were new and with their demise the funding has fallen fully on the smaller local authorities. No significant central government funding helps to support the regional parks, which it can be argued are a resource of national significance. Since the removal of the direct financial support of the ranger services SNH's role as a champion and mentor for the Regional Parks has been significantly weakened.
- 8.2 The role of the regional parks to provide recreational opportunities close to where people live, in relatively wild hill country requires, above all, transport links from the main centres of population – particularly for those without a car, largely many young people and those with limited financial resources. It also requires staff to work with groups of people such as youth groups, those with limited mobility and people with mental and physical problems. Without these two resources of transport and facilitation the regional parks could remain primarily used by those with a car and those who are familiar and comfortable with upland country for walking, cycling and horse riding.
- 8.3 The Pentland Hills Regional Park no longer has a base in the park and is managed by a significantly reduced staff from an office in the city of Edinburgh. The park manager is part-time and one of its two major visitor centres at Flotterstone has been converted to a café, whilst the other at Harlaw is unstaffed and only open for limited hours. The park remains very popular and at peak times the car parks are full and roadside parking is a problem.
- 8.4 Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park has also suffered cut backs. It's two visitor centres at Cornalees Bridge and Muirshiel are looking tired and have not received investment for a number of years. The maintenance staff for the park are down to three and their work load is limitless. In 2018 the full-time managers post has been reduced to part-time and there is uncertainty about the future of the whole regional park. A review of the park's operation is presently taking place following the latest reduction in funding.

- 8.5 Controversially, large wind farm developments and some forestry planting have been permitted and have seriously damaged the landscape particularly in the southern parts of the park. Despite strong representation by local pressure groups and by a range of national bodies, such as the Scottish Campaign for National Parks, the landscape quality of the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park has in some areas been permitted to decline.
- 8.6 The story in the Lomond Hills Regional Park is even bleaker. The management of the park is now undertaken at arms-length by the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust and the Regional Park has no dedicated staff of its own. The advisory committee has stopped meeting and the Regional Park has to all intents and purposes ceased functioning as such, with the emphasis being placed strongly on the management of the country park at Lochore Meadows.
- 8.7 Unlike the Country Parks and National Parks in Scotland the Regional Park bodies do not own any land or buildings and rely on their local authorities to perform this function. This appears to hinder their ability to develop their recreational infrastructure and puts them strongly under the direct control of the local authorities. They lack their own independent drive and vigour and do not appear to have strong enough support from the national government or from SNH.
- 8.8 In 2014 a further blow to the regional parks was made by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) UK National Committee report - Putting Nature on the Map - which stated that the *“Regional Parks are not able to demonstrate the primacy of nature in policy and the decision making process”* and recommended that they no longer qualified for IUCN Protected Area Category V listing (Protected Landscape or Seascape).
- 8.9 Some strategic decisions are urgently required if the regional parks in Scotland are to survive. The options would appear to fall into three broad categories:
- a. Continuing with the present slow decline in local authority funding which will probably result in the eventual de-designation of the Regional Parks in Scotland.
 - b. Increased funding from a combination of the local authorities and central government, but retaining the same historical objectives for the parks. This seems an unlikely scenario and would require a reversal of the trends of the past decade.
 - c. A re-launch of the regional parks in Scotland with re-defined objectives and funding. This would require the active involvement of SNH and possibly other bodies concerned with health and youth matters and needs impetus from the Scottish Government. This option is explored below.
- 8.10 The role of the voluntary Friends of the Parks could also play a part in the future management and maintenance of the parks, possibly through directing some public funding towards them so that they could take on further functions.

9. A Re-energized Role for Regional Parks in Scotland?

- 9.1 If the regional parks in Scotland are to survive, a new vision and a possibly re-launch is required. As well as reversing the further decline in the three existing Regional Parks there could be value in considering the addition of one or two new ones.
- 9.2 Three areas where there could be support for new regional parks are in the Campsie Fells, the Ochil Hills and an extension of the Lomond Hills Regional Park to include the Loch Leven area in Perthshire. There is an active “friends group” for the Ochil Hills and in 2009 a group of local authorities explored having the Campsie Fells designated a regional park. The Lomond Hills Regional Park could be strengthened by being increased in area and having a partnership approach between Fife and Perth and Kinross Councils.
- 9.3 The major aim of the new regional parks in Scotland could be to both strengthen their role in landscape and nature conservation, to protect and enhance the provision of ecosystem services and further increase their use for recreation and tourism as a contribution to public health and well-being and as a contribution to their local economies. Enhancing transport links between the parks and their major nearby cities could be a further strategic objective.
- 9.4 In the spirit of creating discussion and as the foundation for a much-needed review of the future of the regional parks in Scotland we offer below some possible initiatives that could form the basis of a re-launch of the Regional Parks.

Diversity of Core Funding for the Regional Parks

- 9.5 To date the Regional Parks have relied on their core funding from the local authorities and historically from Scottish Natural Heritage (and formerly The Countryside Commission for Scotland). The emphasis has been solely on countryside funding sources rather than funding associated with health and well-being, youth or social issues.
- 9.6 In the future regional parks could be a partnership of environmental, health and social services funding, reflecting that the services that they will provide would be aimed at tackling obesity and other health issues and providing services for the less well off in their neighbouring urban communities.
- 9.7 The management committees for the regional parks could be re-structured to reflect a broader source of core funding and their relationships with local health and social services organisations. The secondment of staff from Regional Health Boards and social services departments to the Regional Parks should be considered.

New Regional Parks and closer working between them

- 9.8 To re-invigorate the regional parks in Scotland at least two new parks could be created – possibly in the Campsie Fells and in the Ochil Hills. Also Fife and Perth and Kinross local authorities could work together to re-launch an expanded Lomond Hills Regional Park to include the Loch Leven area.
- 9.9 The family of central belt regional parks could work more closely together with some interchange of staff and with joint marketing and projects which involve two or more parks.

A key role should be given to SNH and the Health Boards to provide this joint working and re-launch. The Central Scotland Green Network could play a role in this (see below).

- 9.10 Any such expansion of the regional park network should follow a review of the existing parks and a reorganisation of their funding and management. This could be considered as part of any review of the future expansion of National Parks in Scotland.

Closer working with the Central Scotland Green Network

- 9.11 The Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) states in its vision statement that:

Reflecting our position within the third National Planning Framework (NPF3), our vision for Central Scotland is based on the important contribution that the environment can make to the lives of everyone who lives here. A good-quality environment offers opportunities for promoting a sense of well-being and healthy lifestyles, addressing the legacy of vacant and derelict land across Central Scotland, supporting active travel (by encouraging walking and cycling to school, shops or work along green corridors), and working to ensure that all communities can benefit from proximity to well-managed and accessible greenspace and landscape.

Building on what has already been achieved, we are working with our partners to deliver across Central Scotland a high-quality 'green network' that will meet a number of environmental, social and economic goals designed to improve people's lives, promote economic success, allow nature to flourish and help Scotland respond to the challenge of climate change.

- 9.12 The boundary of the CSGN could be revised to include the whole of the three regional parks in Scotland and a **new Central Belt Regional Parks campaign** launched by CSGN with a budget for projects within the three regional parks. Projects which could be supported include:

- Upland land management/conservation projects
- Transport from the urban communities to the regional parks, particularly for less well-off groups
- Footpath and cycle path development
- Youth activity projects in the uplands
- Walking for Health projects
- Regional Park Marketing

Closer Working with Paths for All

- 9.13 Paths for All stated aims are:

“to significantly increase the number of people who choose to walk in Scotland - whether that's leisure walking or active-choice walking to work, school or shops. We want to create a happier, healthier Scotland, where increased physical activity improves quality of life and wellbeing for all. We work to develop more opportunities and better environments not just for walking, but also for cycling and other activities, to help make Scotland a more active, more prosperous, greener country.”

- 9.14 Established in 1996 Paths for All is core funded by the Scottish Government and operates a number of projects throughout Scotland. The aim is to get more people walking as a benefit to their health and well-being.
- 9.15 A new Paths for all partnership project with the three regional parks in Scotland could promote walking in the parks and be targeted at particular communities.

Enhanced Role for Voluntary Sector

- 9.16 Consideration could be given to enhancing the role of the voluntary sector in the future management, maintenance and promotion of the regional parks. At one extreme this could be to consider converting the overall management of a park to a charitable trust model with staff transferring to a trust, core funded by both the local authorities and central government (and health boards if appropriate).
- 9.17 Increasing the role of the existing Friends of the Park groups is another approach through directing some additional core funding towards them – but not to the detriment of the funding of the existing local authority funded staffing.

APPENDIX 1

Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981

Establishment of regional parks.

After section 48 of the Act of 1967 there shall be inserted the following section—

“48A Regional parks.

(1) A regional park is an extensive area of land, part of which is devoted to the recreational needs of the public.

(2) Regional councils shall have power—

(a) by order to designate lands within their region as regional parks, and

(b) to manage as a single administrative unit any parts of any such park which are under the control of the council, and where it is appropriate that lands extending into more than one region should be designated as a regional park the regional councils concerned may jointly exercise the powers conferred by this subsection.

(3) Subject to subsection (4)(c) below, an order under subsection (2)(a) above shall not take effect until it is confirmed by the Secretary of State, who may confirm such order either without modification or subject to such modifications as he considers expedient.

(4) The Secretary of State shall by regulations made by statutory instrument prescribe the procedure for making orders under subsection (2)(a) above and the form of such orders; and (without prejudice to the generality of this subsection) the regulations shall make provisions as follows:

(a) that before an order under subsection (2)(a) above is submitted to the Secretary of State for confirmation, notice of the terms of the order shall be given to the owners, lessees and occupiers of land within the area designated in the order, and to such other persons, if any, as may be specified in the regulations;

(b) that objections and representations with respect to the order, if duly made in accordance with the regulations, shall be considered by the Secretary of State before he confirms the order;

(c) that if no objections or representations are made in respect of any order, or if any objections or representations made are withdrawn, the order shall not be submitted to the Secretary of State for confirmation, but shall be confirmed without modifications as an unopposed order by the council or councils who made it; and

(d) that copies of confirmed orders shall be served on such person as may be specified in the regulations.

(5) Any statutory instrument made in terms of subsection (4) above shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

(6) Where a planning application is made in relation to lands which fall within an area designated as a regional park, the planning authority shall have regard to the fact that the area has been so designated in considering the application.”

APPENDIX 2

A Parks System for Scotland

Regional Parks — These could be some thousands of hectares in area, with recreation as the dominant use in parts only. The areas within a regional park which would be intensively used for recreation would be linked together by footpaths, with a view to reducing pressure on areas of sensitive farming and forestry interests. Regional parks can be designated by the regional authorities in consultation with the Countryside Commission for Scotland and subject to the approval of central government, and generally they will be managed by the regional authorities with funding support from central government. Legislation enabling statutory recognition to be given to regional parks in Scotland became available in 1981 and approval for a Fife Regional Park, and the Pentland Hills Regional Park, near Edinburgh, was confirmed in 1986.

*From "A Park System and Scenic Conservation in Scotland"
Countryside Commission for Scotland. First published in 1981*

APPENDIX 3

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE INFORMATION PAPER PETITION PE 1095: REGIONAL PARKS

History

1. The seminal document in the history of regional parks is the Countryside Commission for Scotland's A Park System for Scotland (1974). This Report proposed a park system- providing for the whole spectrum of our outdoor recreational needs, starting in the towns and cities and spreading out from there into the countryside.

The proposed recreational hierarchy of parks comprised:

- urban parks (then existing);
- country parks (then existing), which are easily accessible to urban populations and have countryside recreation as the primary land use;
- regional parks (future), which would be larger and more diverse in character and ownership than country parks. Countryside recreation would be one of several land uses and only dominant in selected areas (e.g. country parks, picnic areas), but access would be widely available by footpaths or access agreements; and
- special parks (future National Parks), which would satisfy national demand for recreation in countryside of natural beauty and amenity of national significance requiring care and protection by special park authorities. Recommended areas for special parks were Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, Cairngorms, Glencoe and Glen Nevis.

2. At the time of the Parks System Report, there were statutory provisions for country parks within the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967, for local landscape protection and recreation through green belts, for landscape protection in nationally significant areas through National Park Direction Orders and for nature conservation through national nature reserves, local nature reserves and SSSIs. The Commission advocated further legislative provision for regional parks¹ and special parks.

Legislation/ Development of Regional Parks

3. The then Secretary of State generally accepted the parks system proposals, but stated that implementation would depend on legislative time and funding. Thereafter, progress in establishing regional parks was slow.

4. The Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981 inserted s48A into the 1967 Act - defining a regional park as ... an extensive area of land, part of which is devoted to the recreational needs of the public and giving regional councils powers to designate regional parks and manage any parts under their control as a single unit. Councils can act jointly, where the area of the regional park extends into more than one region. When establishing a regional park, the 1981 Act and associated Regulations require the regional council(s) to notify owners, lessees and occupiers of land proposed for designation, as well as local authorities, statutory undertakers and certain national agencies. If there are no objections, designation may be confirmed through an unopposed order; otherwise, the Secretary of State (now the Scottish Ministers) is required to confirm a designation order, following consideration of objections. The Secretary of State (now the Scottish Ministers) may hold a public inquiry and may confirm an order with, or without, modifications. Owners and other consultees have to be informed of unopposed or confirmed orders^{2*}.

1 . A regional park, similar in concept to that intended by the Countryside Commission for Scotland, was set up in the late-1960s by Renfrew District Council in the Renfrew Hills (Clyde Muirshiel) prior to the Park System Report.

5. Under the provisions of the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981, the designations of Fife Regional Park and Pentland Hills Regional Park were confirmed in 1986, and the Loch Lomond Regional Park in 1988 and Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park in 1990; in each case, following statutory notification, objection and inquiry procedures, as required.

Conservation

6. Whilst the main reason for establishing Regional Parks was the need for managing and facilitating appropriate recreational use, in practice their work also extends to conservation and enhancement of the natural heritage on which the quality of the recreational experience depends. They include important landscapes of local and regional value as well as nature conservation interests of local, national and international importance, and have been recognised by IUCN as Category V protected landscapes.

7. All of Scotland's regional parks contain SSSIs³, and park management can co-ordinate landowners making it possible carry out projects on a landscape scale, as opposed to working with individual landowners. Another key advantage, in terms of conservation, is having a ranger service on site. They may themselves carry out projects and undertake monitoring, but they also have a valuable role in training and managing volunteers and in sharing good practice on land management with the land-managers in the area. Rangers also raise awareness of the special habitats and species in the park to visitors through interpretation and walks, and to local schools. This heightened awareness results in more responsible access to the park and so benefits the natural heritage of the site. Regional parks also work with Local Biodiversity Action Partnerships, largely through the involvement of the ranger services, to deliver benefits to priority species and habitats.

Consolidation of Scottish Planning Policy

8. The Committee will be aware that Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) is being rationalised, with subject policies – including SPP6 – being

1 Enactment of the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981 was followed by advice from the CCS in A Policy for Regional Parks and from the Secretary of State in SDD Circular 38/1981.

2 The Pentlands and Lomond Hills Regional Parks have three SSSIs each and Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park has five. In addition, the Renfrew Heights Special protection Area (SPA) lies wholly within the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park.

3 consolidated into a single document. While the final approved version of the consolidated SPP has not yet been published, it is considered that the Committee may find the following references to the draft consolidated SPP helpful.

Planning and Regional Parks

9. The draft consolidated SPP indicates that regional parks and country parks have a statutory basis and have been designated by local authorities to provide recreational access to the countryside close to centres of population. It states that planning authorities should take this purpose into account when making decisions that affect them.

10. The draft sets out the considerations that planning authorities should take into account when preparing spatial frameworks for wind farms over 20 MW (around 7 turbines). The policy recognises that similar considerations may be relevant to smaller proposals depending on the circumstances. The spatial framework should identify: a) areas requiring significant protection because they are designated for their national or international landscape or natural heritage value, are designated as green belt or are areas where the cumulative impact of existing and consented wind farms limits further development; b) areas with potential constraints where proposals will be considered on their individual merits against identified criteria; and c) areas of search where appropriate proposals are likely to be supported subject to detailed consideration against identified criteria

11. Planning Advice Note 45, Annex 2: Preparing Spatial Frameworks and Supplementary Planning Guidance for Wind Farms which provides advice on the siting of wind farms will be revised to reflect the incorporation of SPP 6 – on which it is based – into the consolidated SPP. In the interim, the aims and advice set out in Annex 2 will require to be read in conjunction with the new consolidated SPP once it is published.

12. The draft consolidated SPP recognises that the level of protection afforded to sites designated for their recreational interests, such as regional parks, should not be as high as that given to an area designated for its national or international or natural heritage value. The SPP does not support a blanket restriction on wind farm development in these areas although it is made clear that developers must satisfactorily address any impacts on the particular interest that the designation is intended to protect.

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park (CMRP) – Protection of Designated Areas/ Cumulative Impact

13. The higher level of protection at 10 a) above applies within parts of the CMRP that are designated as green belt or as a Natura site e.g. the Renfrew Heights Special protection Area (SPA). Planning authorities should also use the development plan process to identify areas that should be afforded significant protection from further development when it is considered that such development would result in unacceptable cumulative impacts. There is therefore already a robust planning policy framework in place to protect the recreational value of the park, its landscape attributes and the important habitats which lie within it.

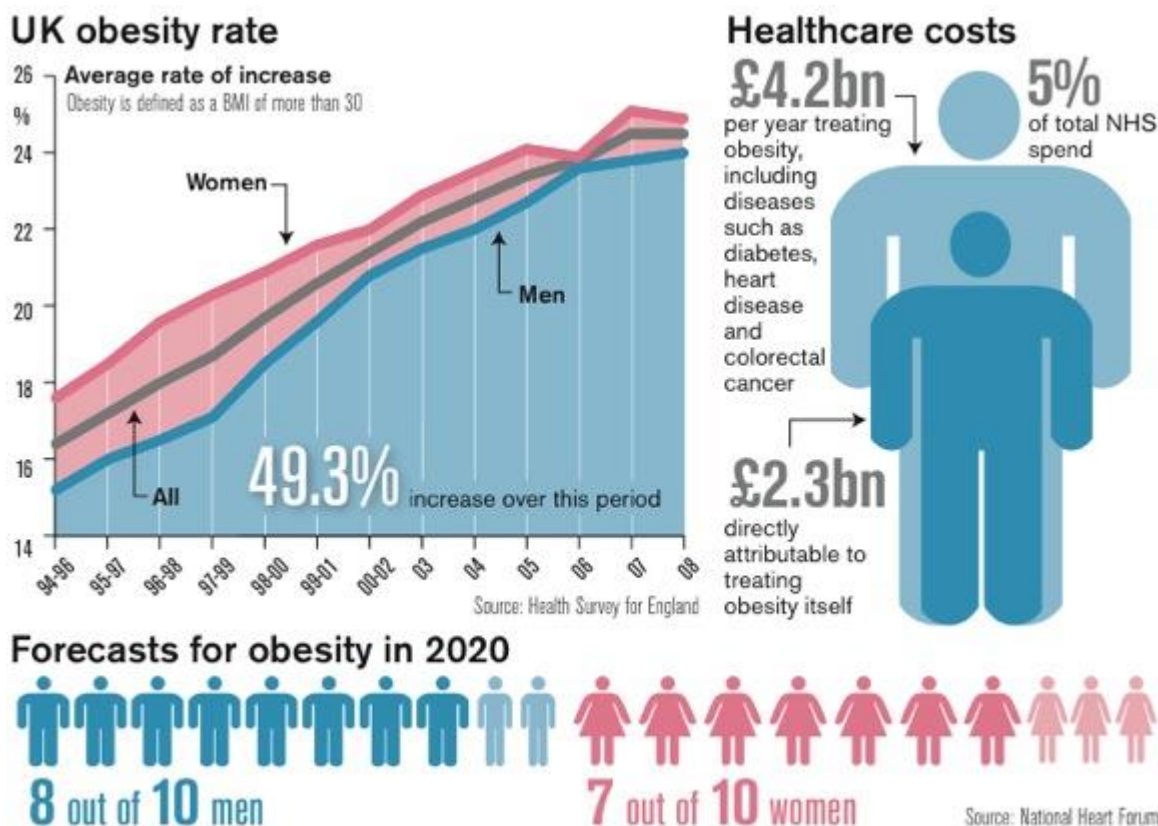
14. Of the 8 applications which have been determined to date in or partly in the CMRP, 3 have been approved, 2 have been refused/ dismissed and 3 have been withdrawn. The maps which have been provided with this paper identify approved and proposed wind farm locations. Given the development already approved, cumulative impact will be an important consideration in determining any future applications.

Scottish Government Dec 2009

Appendix 4

THE OBESITY CRISIS in SCOTLAND

The obesity crisis in Scotland and the UK as a whole is a serious problem and costs the NHS over £4 million per annum in treating obesity or the diseases that it causes. The problem is illustrated in the figure below taken from the National Heart Forum



Obesity in Scotland shows a strong link with inequalities. Lower socio-economic status is associated with higher levels of obesity.

- Risk of obesity in children is lowest for those living in more affluent areas.
- 22% of men living in more affluent areas are obese compared to 28% living in deprived areas.
- 21% of women living in more affluent areas are obese compared to 37% living in deprived areas.

Women and children in the most deprived areas are particularly affected by more extreme obesity.

The Scottish Government's main strategy for tackling obesity is 'Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Scotland: A Route Map towards Healthy Weight', published in 2010.

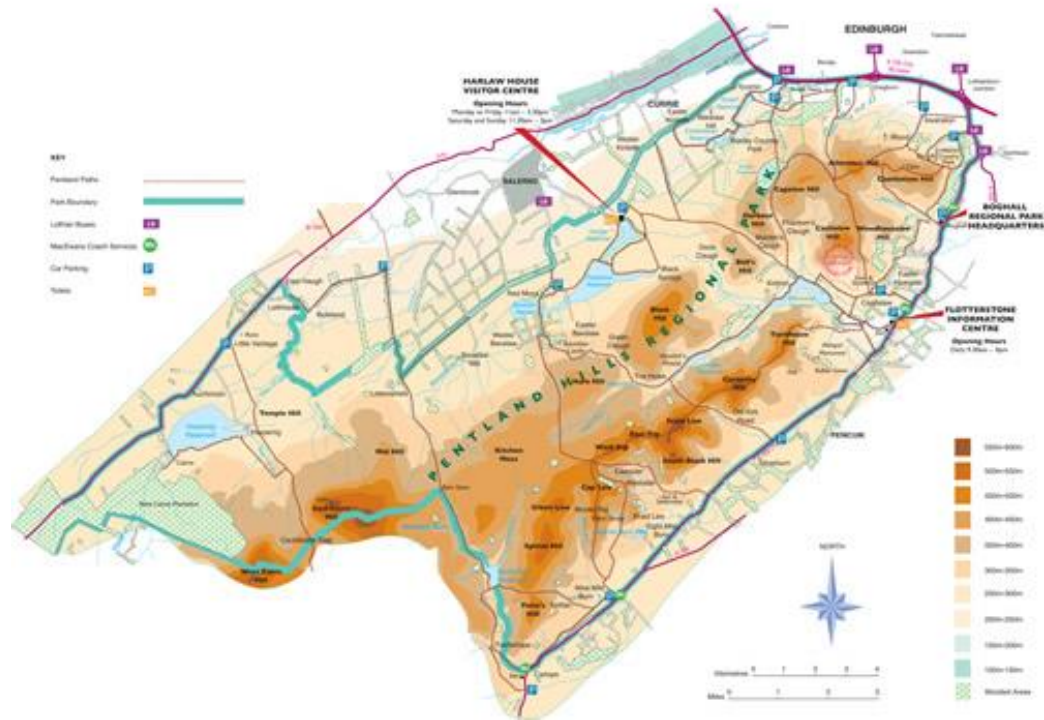
Action is organised around four themes:

- workplace - increasing the responsibility of organisations for the health and wellbeing of their employees
- early years - establishing life-long habits and skills for positive health behaviour through early life interventions

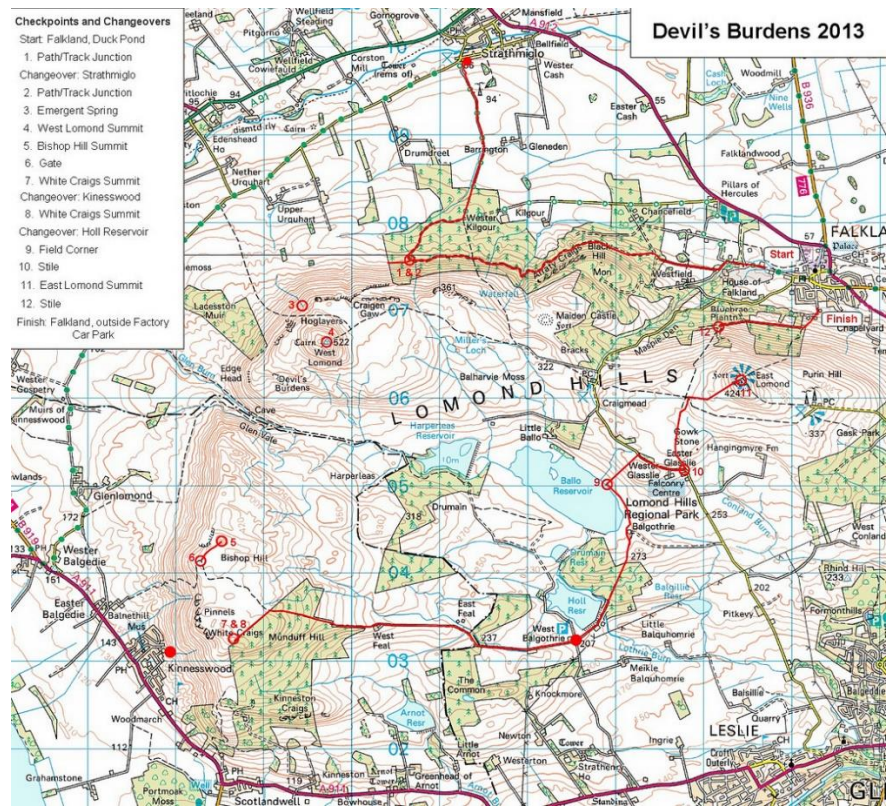
- energy in - reducing energy intake by controlling exposure to, demand for and consumption of excessive quantities of high calorific foods and drinks
- **energy out - increasing energy expenditure by increasing the opportunities for and uptake of walking, cycling and other physical activity in our daily lives and minimising sedentary behaviour.**

Providing opportunities and encouragement to participate in countryside recreation has a potentially important part to play and Regional Parks could provide an introduction to hillwalking and outdoor pursuits which could influence some to adopt more regular exercise.

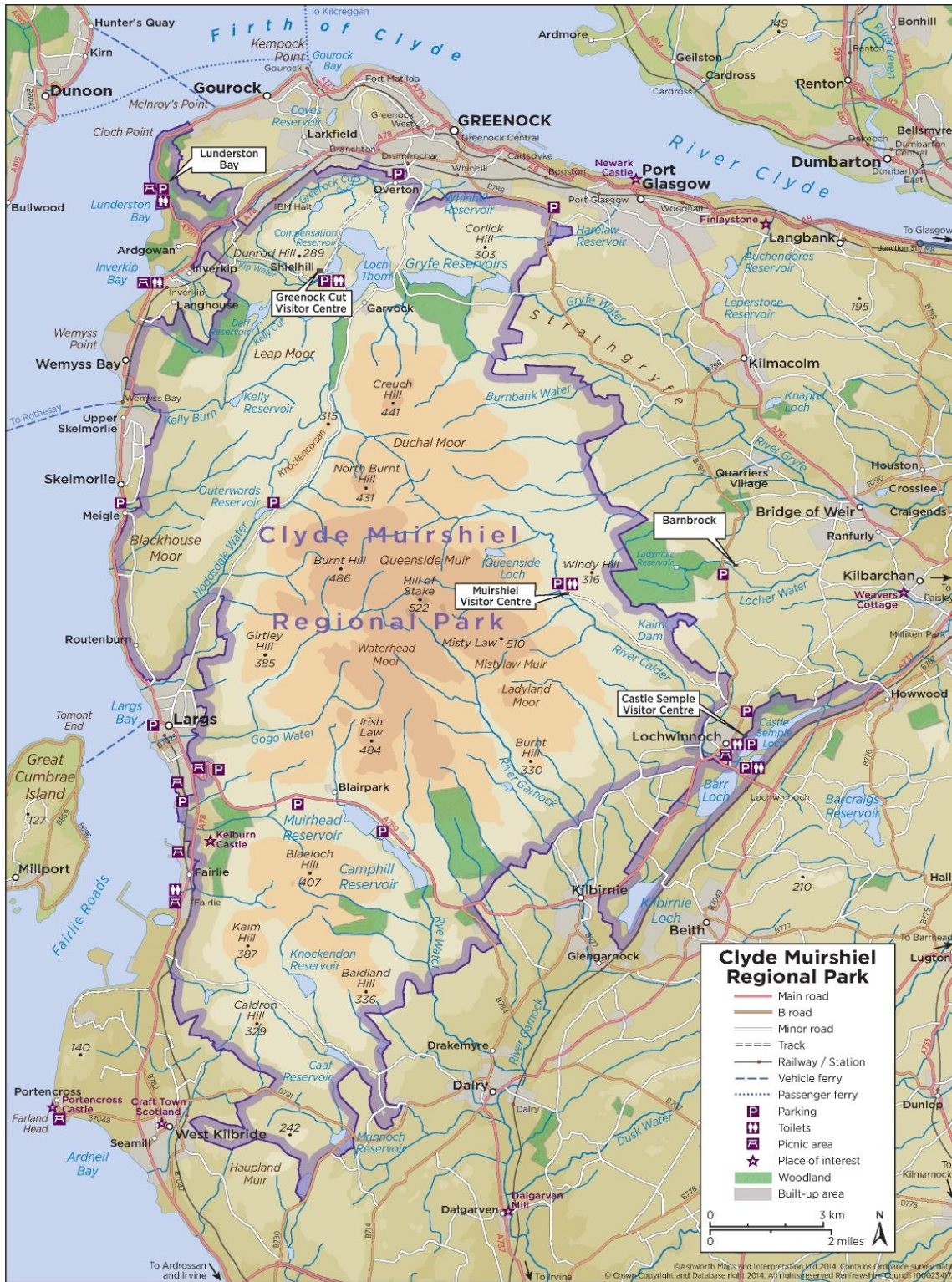
Pentland Hills Regional Park



The Lomond Hills, Fife



Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park



LOMOND HILLS REGIONAL PARK

Designated in 1986 under Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981, **Fife Regional Park** was

renamed **Lomond Hills Regional Park** in 2003, and exists in recognition of the extensive use of the land within its boundary for informal countryside recreation by local communities and visitors to the area.

Lomond Hills Regional Park Partnership is a working partnership of landowners, estate managers, farmers, public sector agencies, individuals and organisations that have an interest in the recreational use and its impact on the day to day life, of the land within and adjacent to the Park boundary.

In two parts, Lomond Hills Regional Park extends over approximately 65 square kilometres of west central Fife, taking in Fife's highest and most heavily used open countryside. In the east it includes most of the Lomond Hills, parts of the River Leven Valley and Balbirnie Park, while in the west it takes in Lochore Meadows Country Park and its surrounding countryside, including parts of Benarty Hill.

Around its boundary are the communities of Gateside, Strathmiglo, Falkland, the new town of Glenrothes, Leslie and the former mining villages of Balingry, Lochore, Crosshill and Glenraig, Lochgelly and Kelty .

The most significant resource in the Regional Park is the land itself. Some 1,120 hectares of land is in public ownership, Fife Council having approximately 500 hectares, and Scottish Water 620 hectares. The balance of 5,355 hectares is in private ownership. The principal land uses are Agriculture, Forestry and Water Catchment. The Regional Park is directly involved in the management of public access to this land for a range of informal recreational purposes.

The main public facilities in the Regional Park are at Lochore Meadows Country Park, and the Pitcairn Centre, Glenrothes. Lochore Meadows functions as the main administrative base and primary area for intensive recreational activities within the Regional Park. At Lochore Meadows there is a Visitors Centre which houses staff accommodation, meeting rooms, cafeteria and toilets. Other buildings provide an Outdoor Education Centre and workshops. The Pitcairn Centre is the base for the Ranger Service and Estate Team in the east of the Regional Park, and has workshops, offices and education facilities. In addition to the above the Park has 14 car parks, 25 miles of paths and two sets of public toilets.

The Park receives in the order of 600,000 to 800,000 visits each year, approximately 400,000 of these to Lochore Meadows. The most popular activity by far is walking, taking place throughout the Park but with a particular emphasis on the Lomond Hills. Lochore Meadows provides the venue for more intensive recreational uses offering a wide range of activities including watersports, golf, fishing, horse riding, and a children's adventure play area.

KEY FACTS

Location: West Central Fife

Area: 65 Square Kilometres

Land Managers: 52

Visits: 600,000 to 800,000

Communities: 11 adjacent communities; population 75,000

Population within Park: approximately 200

Population within 5 miles: 290,000

Population within 50 miles: 2,400,000



Wind farm above Ardrossan



Kelburn Wind Farm