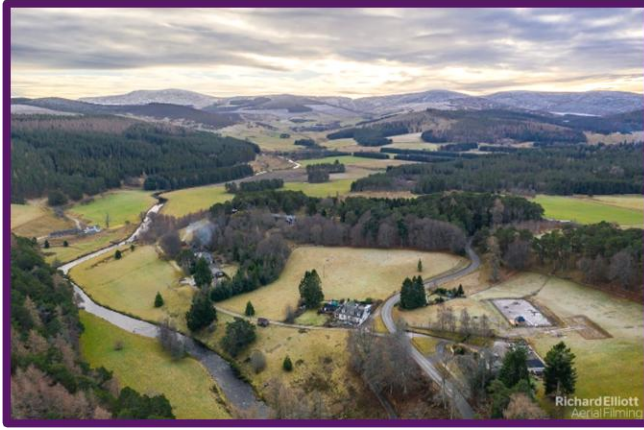




Strathdon Community Action Plan: Looking to 2030

Compiled Autumn/Winter 2024/25

Supported by

Strathdon Community Development Trust

Strathdon Primary School

Facilitated by Marr Area Partnership (MAP) with support from Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS) on behalf of the Park Authority.



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i.Results from Facilitation Exercise

I. Summary

The Strathdon Community Action Plan of 2017 needed to be updated to represent the changing needs of the community. These Action Plans are necessary to support funding applications and planning. Both Cairngorms National Park Authority and Aberdeenshire Council have encouraged and supported the creation of this document.

In May 2016, following extensive work with the community, the Strathdon Community Action Plan was launched. This led to the establishment of the Strathdon Community Development Trust (SCDT) in September 2017 to benefit the community with the aim of advancing community development, both economic and social and to enhance the quality of life of people living in the glen.

In 2022 and 2023, SCDT carried out a Facilitations Exercise called “What the Community Wants”. Using the results of this facilitation exercise and with support from Marr Area Partnership and Voluntary Action in Badenoch & Strathspey, on behalf of the Cairngorms National Park Authority, an open day was held at the Lonach Hall on 9th November 2024 to show the local residents and businesses the outcome of the facilitation exercise and to seek further views on a number of key questions. An invite was personally delivered to most households by volunteers and was advertised on social media.

The process was entitled **Strathdon Community Action Plan: Looking to 2030**. Given the increased need now to also focus on longer-term goals, particularly in relation to the environment and the economy, residents and businesses were asked to consider where they and the community wanted to be by 2030, so generating a more extended set of plans and aspirations.

Examples of **Strathdon’s recent successes** with community projects and action planning include:

- Webcam at Cockbridge snow gates,
- Bellabeg Community Notice Board refurbished and sited near the Clubbie Rooms,
- Success in gaining £5k from the visitor infrastructure improvement fund for path between bellabeg and Newe, where new housing has been developed,
- Benches and picnic tables sited at strategic locations and trees, bulbs and flowers planted,
- A new ‘Paths around Strathdon’ leaflet has been produced with the Park Authority,
- The Tennis courts have been refurbished and are cleaned annually,
- Housing Needs survey, commissioned with the Communities Housing Trust to assess the demand for affordable housing in the area,
- Land audit completed by Communities Housing Trust, funded by the Park Authority,
- An annual litter pick takes place in March,
- Xmas Lights switch on,
- Community Action Plan reviewed,
- Doune Community Cabin has opened,
- Tidy up of the Toilet at Bellabeg,
- Heritage Group has been started,

To help add to these achievements, residents were encouraged to take part in the community action plan review in 2024. However, this time round people were invited to think not only about what might be achieved together, but that the projects the village was being asked to consider, would be ones that would help Strathdon develop a more sustainable future. This is set against a backdrop of life post-lockdowns, the challenge of finding new volunteers plus the changing economic and climate situation we find ourselves in. The challenges for rural communities, both economic and social, are becoming undeniable.

2. The Community

Strathdon is an upland rural area on the eastern edge of the Cairngorms Mountain range within the Cairngorms National Park. It includes the parishes of Glenbuchat and Corgarff. The whole area is approximately 16 miles long by 6 miles wide and constitutes part of Upper Donside with Glenkindie and Towie.

Strathdon is an informal geographical area. This means that there are no precise boundaries in terms of where it begins or ends. To the east are Glenkindie and Towie with shared facilities of shops, surgery and church. Strathdon is the founding place of the Lonach Highland and Friendly Society and the Lonach Highland Gathering.

The Strathdon area is bound by the Deeside Hills to the south and the Ladder Hills to the north and includes the mountain road to the Lecht Ski Centre. It broadly follows the River Don from its source at 2000 feet above sea level, eastwards to Corgarff Castle and onwards to Glenbuchat Castle, which stands at the foot of the dominant landmark of Ben Newe. Strathdon's high altitude makes its weather unpredictable and its winters particularly harsh and long. The waters of glens Ernan, Nocht, Buchat, Deochry, Conrie, Carvie and Deskry all feed into the Don.

The area has a distinctive and specific geography and shows much evidence of glaciation, particularly in its rounded hills. It is home to an abundance of wildlife including red and roe deer, ptarmigan, red squirrels, mountain hares, crossbills, buzzards, red kite, golden eagles and visiting ospreys.

Although it is officially recognised by some bodies as a very remote and rural area with a lack of facilities, the wider area of Strathdon has shown itself to be a remarkably resilient, independent and self-reliant community. Recent economic and demographic changes have led to more modern challenges such as the potential loss of facilities.

Community Organisations

There are a significant number of community organisations/groups which work for the benefit of the community and are almost entirely run by volunteers.

These include: Strathdon Community Development Trust, Strathdon Primary School Parent Council, Lonach Highland and Friendly Society, The Silver Circle, Upper Donside Charitable Trust, Lonach Hall Community Association, Corgarff Hall Committee, Glenbuchat Hall Committee, Lonach Pipe Band, Lonach Highland Dancing, Mother and Toddlers, Strathdon Walking Group, Strathdon Church Monday Club, Corgarff Games, Scottish Country Dancing, Puffins Running Group, Strathdon Paths Group, Heritage Group, Crochet with Babs, Art in the Buchat/Strathdon HeArts.

Community Assets

Halls & Buildings

Lonach Hall
Glenbuchat Hall
Clubbie Rooms
Medical Centre
Doune Court Sheltered Housing

Corgarff Hall
Church and Hall
Steading Bar (currently closed)
School

Heritage Services

Corgarff Castle
Commonwealth War Graveyard
Heughhead Phone Box

War Memorial
Poldhullie Bridge
Glenbuchat Live music

Outdoor and Recreational

Lonach Games Field
Play Park
Picnic Area
Football Field
Woodbank

Strathdon Paths Network
Lecht Ski Area
Tennis Courts
The Doune

Services

Doune Cabin
Recycling

Toilets
Community Noticeboard

Local Businesses

There are many local businesses, across many sectors, operating in the area, although there is currently no local business/tourism association to represent the voice of commercial activity in the village. Strathdon services include the Spar Shop, Goodbrand and Ross Café and an increasing variety of visitor/tourist accommodation. In addition to the predominant farming and forestry businesses there are a number of services and tradespeople who serve the wider area. There is also a growing number of artists, musicians and creatives in the area. There is also an increasing number of people who work from home in addition to those who commute.

3. The Process

Involving People & Refining Ideas

With a view to updating the Strathdon Action Plan of 2017 the Strathdon Community Development Trust carried out “What the community wants” facilitation exercises in April 2022 and Sept 2022. For a full list of what came out of these events see [Sect 9 Appendices Appendix 1. Result from Facilitation Exercises.](#)

This was followed by a BIG CONVERSATION on 9th November 2024



At this drop in event, the results of the facilitation exercises were offered back to the community and time given for reflection and discussion around the topics. During the event, all the residents who attended were asked to consider the top priorities that had been identified from the process under the headings of Strathdon:

- A Socially Connected Community
- A Climate Conscious Community
- An Economically Thriving Community
- A Community for our Young People

They were asked to look at those areas of particular interest to them and write on action plan templates aimed at refining ideas by looking at questions such as: *What specific action needs to be taken to achieve this priority* and *Who needs to be involved?*

Thanks go to the 47 residents and businesses in Strathdon who attended the Big Conversation and the children from the Primary School who contributed so meaningfully and thoughtfully to the facilitation exercise.

CAP document production

All of the comments and pieces of information given by the public during the **Strathdon Big Conversation** event were collected and incorporated into this report, which now will be used as the basis for ongoing community development in the village over the next 5-8 years, with support from the community's organisations and all other relevant stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sector.

4. Community Engagement

- The National Standards for Community Engagement are good-practice principles designed to improve and guide the process of community engagement. The main elements of effective community engagement are: - Inclusion, Support, Planning, Working together, Methods, Communication, Impact.
- They provide detailed performance statements that everyone involved can use to achieve the highest quality results and the greatest impact.
- The standards are particularly helpful for communities - their organisations and groups - to help them involve their members or the wider community in shaping the services and changes they need, and to make sure they accurately represent members' or the community's views in the decision-making processes.

5. Action Plan – what the community wants

Project Themes and Priorities

The Community Action Plan (CAP) sets out the community's vision for the longer term (up to 10 years) itemising priority outcomes and actions which are shown in the relevant tables below.

It is important to note that some of the projects are already underway, and others will take significantly more time to plan and execute. Much of this is dependent on community engagement and support from a small community.

STRATHDON: A SOCIALLY CONNECTED COMMUNITY

Priority: Create more housing for people who want to live and work here

- Progress community owned housing project. Must be 'affordable' – for rent & purchase/available for permanent residents
- Progress discussion on wider housing issues eg empty properties.

Priority: Improved Health facilities

- Maintain and improve medical and social care services
- Improve access to fitness facilities

Priority: More Community Activities

- More types of activities for all ages
- A place for social gathering eg pub, eatery

PRIORITY: CREATE MORE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO LIVE AND WORK HERE

- Continue discussions on the Lonach Hotel site.
- Explore different ways of taking forward affordable housing in the area.
- Doune Court sheltered housing is a great asset. Following the Council's decision to reprieve Doune Court there is room for improvement e.g. discussion with the council re management, maintenance and letting of warden's flat.
- Renovate! Use derelict properties/ground for self-sufficiency for affordable housing to let or buy.
- Repurpose unwanted spaces/buildings.

PRIORITY: IMPROVED HEALTH FACILITIES

- Please keep the excellent GP surgery services we currently have
- Explore the possibilities of improving GP surgery e.g. local immunisation
- Explore extending wellness facilities
- Discussion with GP

PRIORITY: MORE COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

- We need a pub including refreshments
- Film nights
- Café Strathdon – even “pop-up”
- Sort out with Council/police “road closed” signed due to snow. It affects businesses and personal lives
- Heritage group
- Sort BT removing landlines by 2027

STRATHDON: A CLIMATE CONSCIOUS COMMUNITY

Priority: Develop community renewable energy projects

- Look into possibilities for wind, water, solar energy production in the community
- Electric charging points – in accessible locations
- Community transport scheme
- Advice for insulating residential properties

Priority: Improved path network in community (foot/cycle)

- Continue to develop and maintain path network

Priority: Develop community growing spaces/community garden

- Community garden/allotments for personal food produce including polytunnels for year-round produce
- Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle

In Oct. 2021 a Climate Ready Strathdon event was held at Strathdon School initiated by Climate Ready Aberdeenshire and Adaptation Scotland/SNIFFER. The following topics were discussed by participants.

PRIORITY: DEVELOP COMMUNITY RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT

- More solar panels on public buildings
- Wood fuel project to make money and donate to wood bank
- Develop power generation using water, rivers, burns etc.
- Continue discussions with Dorenell Windfarm re future community financial benefits
- Doune Cabin can be used to recycle unwanted goods and plants and advertises larger items and services.
- Use existing buildings and empty spaces rather than build new = more climate friendly

PRIORITY: IMPROVE PATH NETWORK IN THE COMMUNITY

- Paths group has achieved quite a lot over the last 5 years, but further projects would be: Strathdon School to Poldhuillie Bridge and Lonach Hall to Newe car park,
- Social prescribing. The goals are to reduce the rise of health care costs by pursuing outdoor activities such as walking – a good case for better paths network
- More maps on boards in Corgarff and Strathdon in car parks for example. Make It easier for visitors

PRIORITY: DEVELOP COMMUNITY GROWING SPACES AND COMMUNITY GARDEN

- Explore space for growing community veg and fruit,

STRATHDON: AN ECONOMICALLY THRIVING COMMUNITY

Priority: Improve opportunities for local employment/business

- Provision of small unit office/business space
- Improve broadband for effective home working
- Pub/eatery
- Community run bunk house

Priority: Explore the use of the Clubbie

- Continue to develop and maintain path network

Priority: Lonach Hotel Site

PRIORITY: IMPROVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL EMPLOYMENT / BUSINESS

- Fibre broadband/Better internet
- Green employment possibility e.g. Distillery, water bottling, for 10-30 people. Would need major funding for development
- Explore options for capital funding to buy shop premises
- Consider the barriers for local tradespeople such as plumber, electrician, hairdresser

PRIORITY: EXPLORE/DISCUSS THE POTENTIAL USE OF THE CLUBBIE FOR COMMUNITY USE

- This has been frequently raised in Community Consultations. Currently the building is sound but with only electricity and no working plumbing, In the past the Council intimated that because of flood risk its use is restricted. Currently it is used as the store for Lonach games equipment.
- Ongoing discussions and offer from with the Lonach Highland Society re access to the Clubbie for community use as heritage space.

PRIORITY: LONACH HOTEL SITE

- Currently there are no plans for the Lonach Hotel site involving the community.

STRATHDON: A COMMUNITY FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Priority: Deliver more activities for young people

- Youth club
- Log play area for all ages
- Climbing wall
- Ball pit/soft play area
- Community run bunk house

PRIORITY: DELIVER MORE ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- Family friendly events.
- Discussions involving all the Halls in the area for coordinated activities
- Survey and then develop young folk events programme

6. Spatial Priorities

The maps below illustrate the spatial proposals to help realise Strathdon's community vision and Community Action Plan. They display comments which were provided by Strathdon residents and businesses during the Big Conversation drop-in event. They refer to the priorities that have come out of the Community Action Plan (CAP) responses and help express the community's aspirations and solutions for development and use of land within the Local Development Plan. This reflects the local planning policy which aims to create sustainable, liveable and productive places as expressed in National Planning Framework 4 (2023).



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The maps show the community's ideas and priorities for the future development of the Strathdon area, as well as helping the community to develop and deliver its own projects.

The purpose of the maps is to:

- Complement the CAP by showing how the Strathdon community could look in the future once the vision and CAP have been implemented.
- Help the Strathdon Community Development Trust and Park Authority consider the impact of planning applications on the community.
- Inform Park Authority review of the Local Development Plan.
- Influence investment from public bodies, funders, landowners and businesses, in ways that support the community.

7. Next Steps: Delivery

Steps to deliver the Strathdon Community Action Plan

The next steps to start working with the action plan and looking at how parts can start to be delivered will be subject to some discussion within Strathdon's community organisations, but broadly involves **collectively**:

- Agreeing what priorities will be taken forward initially
- Agreeing to adopt the Values and Principles laid out below
- Agreeing what priorities will be taken forward initially
- Drawing up a more detailed delivery action plan for each prioritised project, identifying aims, actions, milestones, who needs to be involved, key deliverables.
- Communicating progress with the community
- Reviewing progress on a regular basis
- Revisiting the action plan as required

Values and Principles

The following values and principles will underpin the way in which this action plan is rolled out and implemented:

- 1) A plan for all – it is the responsibility of the whole community (individuals and groups) to unite and work together for project ambitions to be realised
- 2) Transparency – all ideas should be planned and researched openly with a commitment to co-production where groups contribute to the ideas as they develop
- 3) Partnership – working together with a shared agenda will be at the heart of any activity arising from this plan
- 4) Inclusion – everyone is invited to participate and everyone benefits, regardless of age and ability
- 5) Impact – the success of this plan will be judged on activities which have a positive influence on people and communities
- 6) Involvement – ensuring the community is meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their lives

The priorities fall into two main groups and will require to be tackled in a different way:

- projects which, although some are mid to longer term, are possible for the community to take forward themselves, with some minimal support from the relevant key agencies or support organisations.
- large, complex issues around employment, housing, transport, business support and infrastructure, where the community will require a great deal of long-term assistance from various public, third and sometimes private sector organisations in order to take these forward and make a notable difference.

8. Thanks & Acknowledgements

Thanks for all their involvement and hard work in helping to make the process a success must go to:

- Strathdon Community Development Trust
- Strathdon Primary School

Marr Area Partnership (MAP) and Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS), as independent community and volunteering development charities, supported the Strathdon community through this community action planning process and facilitated the Big Conversation, but always following the community's lead in how they wished to proceed.

Community Action Planning (CAP) is carried out in partnership by all the Cairngorms National Park communities on a regular basis at the community's request.

Funding to MAP and VABS to facilitate the communities' CAP process is provided by the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

9. Appendices

Appendix I. Results from facilitation exercise

What the Community has said

Strathdon Development Trust AGM -27thApril 2022

Results of the Facilitation Exercise – “What the Community wants”

Clubby building

- This would make a great restaurant if ex Colquhonnies is not going ahead as an eatery. There is absolutely no eating out places in Upper Donside apart from Goodbrands.
- Develop Clubbie into tourist Venue like Muir of Dinnet.
- Develop as Visitor Centre.
- Clubbie – planning permission refused due to flood risk to site.
- Clubbie museum for Lonach memorabilia and other local history.
- Clubby - potential community café, summer season, perhaps include selling space for local artists and makers, housing unit for resident manager/community liaison person.
- Clubby rooms super space for “pop up” cafes/repair (sewing machines and bicycle), museum (unmanned), craft space.

Affordable Housing

- Yes, consider hotel site as no longer viable and owners happy to see affordable housing.
- Yes, needed but where?
- What is affordable – consultation needed.
- Affordable Housing, NET ZERO, - definition of affordable.
- Shortage of property to buy for younger generation which is our future.

New Larger Surgery

- GP surgery in more accessible place in NET Zero environment.
- Never really thought much about this and feel it is fine. People who work there might feel it outdated though.
- Larger Surgery + Health club + Gym.
- Health Hut/gym.
- Expand existing plot to make a health hub (improving viability of rural practice).

Strathdon Climate Action project

- Community Energy project (wind, water, solar power) x4.
- Community renewable sustainable energy scheme.
- Community Energy/ battery storage/ generators.
- I would support action on climate change but don't know what to do.
- Improved insulation.
- Think using fallen trees for fuel poverty is a great idea and would help tidy the place up, problem is as soon as third parties start cutting trees =questions arise about who owns the land etc.
- Electric Car scheme and Charging points.

Outdoor Fitness Equipment

- Good idea. X3
- Could be made locally at affordable cost?
- Yes, Similar to Ballater, 3 pieces of equipment. Appeal to locals and visitors.

Food Bank

- Needs some publicity – not used much.
- Information on this please.
- Foodbank- where, how do we get information? We need obvious Community Board.
- Many people in the community are struggling with cost of living. So, expansion of food bank would be very welcome. Need to expand supply of food.
- Collect from supermarkets almost out of date produce, set up local distributors, have a way of sourcing who needs help.

Resilience Planning & Communications

- We need a Communication Notice Board that is very central and easy to access.
- Ham Radio Network.
- Community energy project (wind water, solar propane gas, generator)
- Resilience hub – one central one in Bellabeg, and satellites in other villages and solar panels for the hub.
- There should be a small Resilience Committee set up ASAP. Two members from Corgarff/ Strathdon/ Glenbuchat/ Glenkindie and 2 designated gathering places where they go to when emergency arises and stat planning involving others.
- Community generator x2
- Community radio

Village Planters

- This would look good but again we need people to do this and maintain, there are just so many areas needing upgrading, weeding, etc., tidying up.
- Yes Great idea, local gardeners, local pride in our community, attractive to tourists.
- Both ends of Bellabeg besides village sign.

Other ideas

- A community Garden/ polytunnel in village
- Restaurant needed.
- We need a notice board.
- Areas for walks having dog poo bins, folks could donate compostable bags for the cause. Local folks like myself could empty the bins, local council needed.
- Try to encourage young couples and young couples with families to become involved in everything in general.
- it would be good if the three halls had a couple of Reps who met occasionally. Each hall has its own events which everyone works well with. For example, Car-boot is soon in Glenbuchat then could be in Corgarff next year and Lonach the year after.
- We really need to attract people from the community to turn out and volunteer their services. There are so many community projects which need regular maintenance etc.
- Communal produce share – home grown vegetables and plants
- Sharing produce with local community – a Market stall?
- Transport- car share scheme, mobility scooters, buggy hire, for less mobile
- More Community Club activities – book club, drop in café, feed dogs too, choir
- Heritage, history, archaeology group
- More picnic benches besides Doune & replace ones at the toilets.
- Affordable housing for people.
- Provision for young families, mother/toddler group, playgroup, social facilities
- Update on Wi-Fi – are there still areas with poor signal?
- Hotel- What is happening if anything about the Colquhonnies?
- Broad band needed – fast for home working.

- Transport
- Community web page for visitors and locals, the old page was taken down about five years ago and nothing is in its place.
- Heritage group

Strathdon Community Development Trust Ongoing Consultation

- What does the Community need?

Forbestown Path Opening event 23rd Sept. 2022 including comments from Strathdon School pupils.

- Film night x 2
- More footpaths and cycle paths
- Somewhere to eat
- Affordable housing
- Log play area for all ages
- Swimming pool x 2
- Whist drives
- Repair café – bring your broken things to be repaired rather than throw them away.
- Use the Club House
- Kids/Youth club - learn life skills (café?)
- Game night
- Local Community website for visitors and local too
- Indoor games x 2
- Café / Hub / Meeting place
- Even more footpaths
- More outdoor games - for older people
- Drop in hub
- Art /Craft workshop/ Gallery
- Animal shop
- Toast in the morning at school
- Water slide x 2
- Zip line
- Balloons
- Climbing wall
- Ball pit
- Soft play

What are the main needs:

- Affordable housing - whole variety of types
- Eatery/pub
- Hub
- Workshop/Craft exhibition/shop space
- Surgery +
- Bunk house
- Office/business space

Lonach Hotel Site Discussions - Options Appraisal Document Oct 2023

Background

Following extensive work with the community the Strathdon Community Action plan was launched in May 2016. This led to the establishment of the Strathdon Community Development Trust in Sept. 2017 to benefit the community with the aim of advancing community development, both economic and social and to enhance the quality of life of people living in the glen.

Within the Action Plan several themes emerged of varying complexity. Some such as Housing impacted different groups within the community and related to further issues such as employment, business development and social integration. The Action Plan was reviewed in 2018 and while many issues had moved forward, little had been achieved in terms of Housing.

In 2018 SCDT was approached by the Linos to discuss the future of the Lonach Hotel site. They were concerned about the viability of an hotel and given the lack of affordable housing in the area were keen to look at this and other possible uses in more detail. This resulted in discussions with the Community Housing Trust (CHT) who were involved in a project in Tomintoul and the North East Preservation Trust (NEPT) leading to a Housing Needs Assessment being carried out in the winter of 2022. It showed that there was a need for a variety of affordable housing within the area. A presentation of these findings allowed a forum for a variety of views and indicated that there was general support for additional affordable housing but a variety of views as to where this should be located and disquiet about the lack of eating and drinking facilities on the Lonach Hotel site. A land audit to check on other possible housing sites was undertaken with negative results.

At a meeting between Lynne Lino, CHT, NEPT, Cairngorms Business Partnership and members of SCDT it was agreed that the next step forward was an Options Appraisal focusing on the Lonach Hotel site given that the building requires immediate attention. To this end a final consultation with the community should take place via social media to crystallize the options in terms of what facilities were deemed to be needed. Then feasibility work could consider the practicalities and the extent of the site. Alongside this the issue of ownership and use of the Scottish Land Fund needs to be urgently considered.

The Site

The Lonach Hotel is a large vernacular stone building with slate covered pitched roof with ancillary buildings to its west side. It sits on a large sloping site adjacent to the Lonach Hall. Between the two are ruins of the castle. The ancillary buildings consist of farm buildings in various states of disrepair part of which is the refurbished Steading bar. Behind the Lonach Hotel building is a field which may be considered within this plan.