

Kirkconnel Parish  
Place Plan 2023-2033

# Part 1: A Vision for Change



## Kirkconnel Parish visual identity



The visual identify for the Place Plan looks to complement the ten-year vision for the ambitious regeneration, resilience and growth of the Kirkconnel Parish area which will benefit all aspects of the community – householders, businesses and individuals.

Our icon is a representation of a block of coal, paying homage to the history and heritage of the area. Each facet of the icon reflects the colours and geography surrounding the Kirkconnel Parish area - grain, stone, grass, coal, flora and river.



Kirkconnel War Memorial



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# Acknowledgement

As the Chair of the Kirkconnel and Kelloholm Town Team I am pleased to present the Kirkconnel and Kelloholm Place Plan. This document has been developed as a result of the hard work and commitment of the local residents, community organisations, businesses and statutory and voluntary agencies working within the community of Kirkconnel and Kelloholm, supported by CEIS consultants.

The Place Plan sets out our ambitions for the future and gives the community of Kirkconnel and Kelloholm an excellent opportunity to lever in investment across a range of activities that will both support the sustainable regeneration of the community and build on our cultural heritage and assets to create a place that people want to live, work and visit.

I would like to thank all of the members of the Town Team, our strategic partners (D&G Council and South of Scotland Enterprise), CEIS consultants and everyone who took part in the consultation for their ongoing commitment to this process.

I am confident that together we can make a difference by taking ownership of our own destiny and delivering on this ambitious and aspirational plan.

Matt Lammie (Chair)





# 1. Introduction

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This Place Plan sets out a ten-year vision for the ambitious regeneration, resilience and growth of the Kirkconnel Parish area. Located in the Upper Nithsdale valley in the North of the Dumfries and Galloway Council area, the area incorporates the villages of Kirkconnel and Kelloholm and is referred to in the plan as the residents know it as - 'the village'.

It has been prepared in the context of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal. Kirkconnel is one of 5 places in Dumfries and Galloway targeted for investment through the Deal's Place Programme. The preparation of this Plan is the initial step to identify the local vision and ambition for the area from which a range of new initiatives and projects will emerge, some of which may be funded by the Deal, some by other means.

The Plan is framed around five key development themes which, when taken together, offer a balanced yet ambitious ten-year vision for the future of the area, the realisation of which will benefit all aspects of the community - householders, businesses and individuals.

The Plan sets out the ambition to address head on the long-standing needs and challenges faced by the community. To do this, it specifies a phased programme of potential projects that, with targeted investment, will improve the lives and life opportunities of the people living here.

At the heart of the Place Plan is the re-imagining of the relationship which Kirkconnel and Kelloholm has with energy. Powering Scotland's industrial growth has been at the heart of the historical growth of the area. Similarly, the decline of coal mining led to a fall in the local population as people looked elsewhere for employment. The failure to replace coal as an engine for local growth has remained a challenge for the community and is central to the income and employment deprivation levels that we see today.

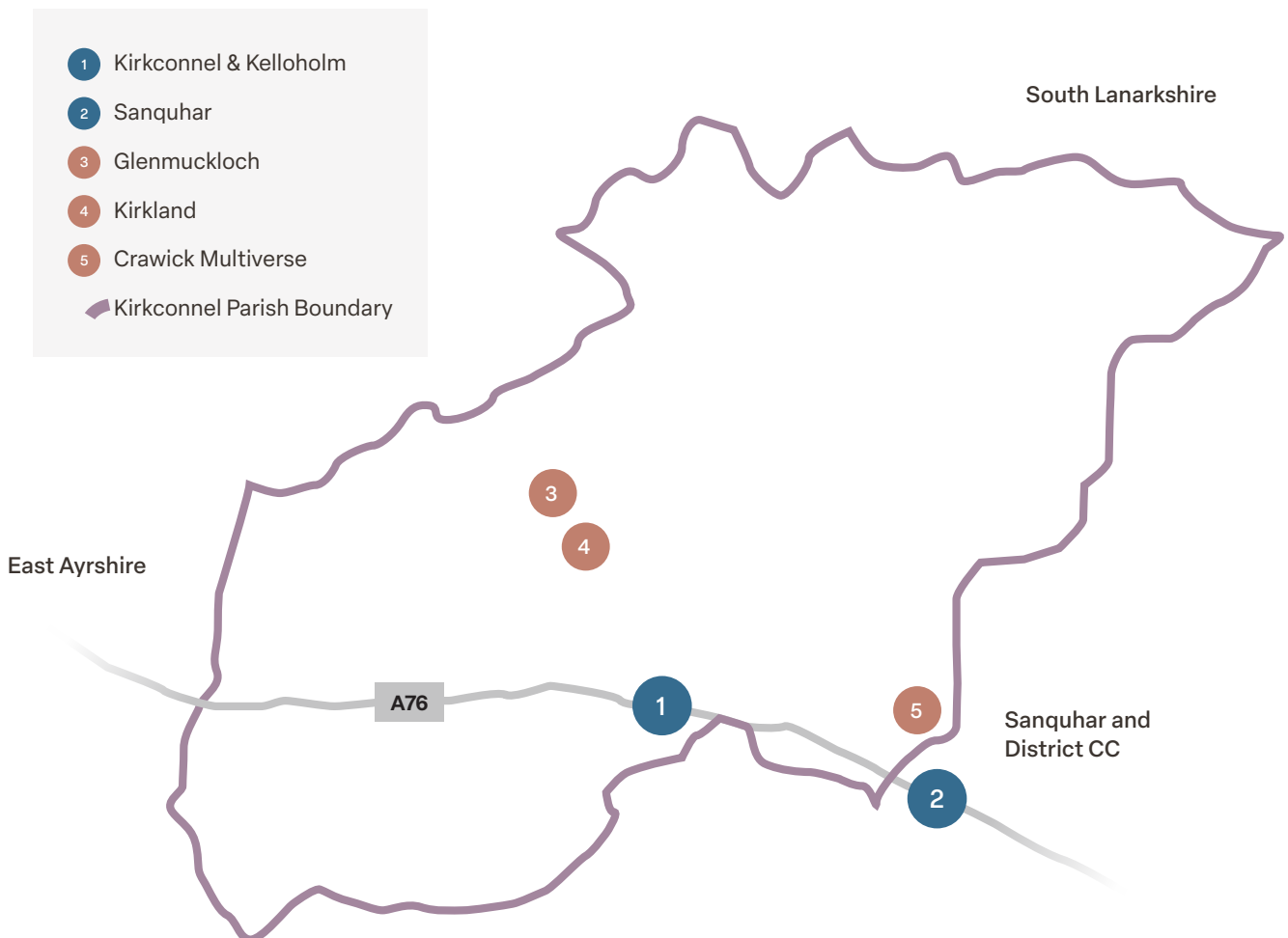
The vision presented within this Place Plan is one that will see energy once again being the engine of transformational local economic growth for Kirkconnel Parish.

In this instance not driven by the black gold of coal but by the opportunities presented by the growth of green, clean renewables technology.



Kirkconnel’s advantage is being located adjacent to **£1billion** of current and planned wind and hydro renewables’ energy projects. Realising the opportunities that this offers, allied to the complimentary development of other key local priorities in housing, tourism, new business space, public realm and skills & training, offers Kirkconnel Parish the chance to repurpose and reinvent the economic and social heart of the town, providing a more prosperous future for all that live and do business here.

This is the vision that the Town Team has. The next step is delivery. This will be realised by the coming together of local community groups, businesses, Dumfries & Galloway Council (D&GC), and South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) under the Town Team collaborative framework. Working together, this mix of local partners will provide the funding, focus and resources to take it forward.





# 2. Our Vision for Kirkconnel Parish

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Our Vision is for an attractive, vibrant and thriving community that makes the most of its natural assets...

...with a diversified, sustainable economy with social and environmental sustainability at its heart



...with good access to services, jobs, housing, shops and amenities



...with good transport, road and rail links to other nearby villages, towns and cities



...with good community and recreational facilities and activities for all



...which celebrates its heritage and makes the most of the natural environment and setting in Upper Nithsdale



...which is home to a community of all ages that is well organised and with a good community spirit





## 2.2 Investment Themes

The Place Plan process has identified five core thematic areas that will underpin and support the achievement of the vision. These are:







A Welcoming Town

A Wellbeing Town



A Centred Town



## 2.3 Strategic Objectives

Directly aligned to the investment themes, the Town Team has set a number of clear strategic objectives with the specific purpose of setting out what the village wants to achieve and to express where it wants to get to. These are:



### 1. A Sustainable Town

Realise the economic benefit of local renewable energy solutions - wind, solar, hydro, hydrogen, storage - for all households, businesses and individuals in the community.



### 2. A Vibrant Town

Create a diversified, sustainable and growing economy that delivers new jobs, learning and training opportunities for all, increasing economic participation and benefits across the community.



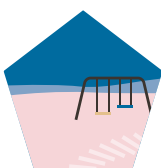
### 3. A Welcoming Town

Increase the number of visitors visiting, staying and spending in Kirkconnel by developing and enhancing the local visitor infrastructure, paths, natural assets and events.



### 4. A Wellbeing Town

Develop new delivery models to enhance and improve the access to, and the range of, community health & recreational facilities and services.



### 5. A Centred Town

Maintain and raise the quality of the physical, built and connected environment to support Kirkconnel to be a better and easier place to live, work, learn and travel to and from.



# 3. Interventions and Investments

The realisation of the ten-year vision for Kirkconnel Parish will be driven and underpinned by the priorities identified within each of the five thematic areas:

Theme 1 - A Sustainable Town

Theme 2 - A Vibrant Town

Theme 3 - A Welcoming Town

Theme 4 - A Wellbeing Town

Theme 5 - A Centred Town

The five themes link directly to the community's stated vision of an area that has a diversified, sustainable economy, with good community amenities, facilities and services, is attractive, has good connectivity and works for all residents.

Each theme has its part to play in realising the vision. They need to knit together and support the others, ensuring delivery of a

Place Plan that is coherent and integrated. The development priorities within each theme have been identified through the extensive community consultation process carried out. They are presented on the following pages under each of the five themes.

Each priority is presented initially at a summary level which is supported by a more detailed action plan which is laid out in Part II, Appendix 3. We also detail the stage of development - aspiration / idea; initial concept / early stages of development; in development; fully developed and ready to start - that each is at and what will be required to take it forward.

The development priorities are presented within the context of a holistic vision for the area that both includes and extends beyond Borderlands investment. Those that meet Borderlands eligibility criteria will be taken forward as part of the Borderlands Town Investment Plan (BTIP) process. Those that fall outside of the BTIP criteria will be progressed in collaboration with other targeted funding programmes.



# A Sustainable Town

## Theme 1 - A Sustainable Town

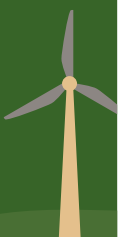
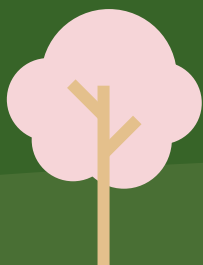
**Strategic Objective:** Realise the economic benefits of local renewable energy solutions - wind, solar, hydro, storage - for all households, businesses and individuals in the community.



The Scottish Government believes that Scotland's massive renewable energy resources can be the bedrock of a new economy. It has a vision of a de-carbonised economy, creating well-paid and secure jobs, providing lower cost energy to households and businesses to create competitive advantages<sup>1</sup>.

This vision will be realised through a range of measures. These include decarbonising Scotland's housing stock, developing pumped-storage hydro projects, the acceleration of hydrogen production, as well as the ongoing development of offshore and onshore wind. However, as we continue the transition to alternative energy sources, the Government aims to ensure job opportunities and wealth are created in a way that does not leave communities behind.

<sup>1</sup> Building a New Scotland - A stronger economy with independence ([www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot))





Kirkconnel Parish is located in proximity to a large number of operational windfarms, including Sanquhar I, Sunnyside, Windy Rig, Twenty Shillings, Sandy Knowe, Clyde, Whiteside Hill, and Harehill. Those in development include Lethans and Sanquhar II, with a number currently at the pre-planning/scoping stage including Sandy Knowe Extension, Rowancraig, Cloud Hill, and Eucharhead. The **£250m** Glenmuckloch pumped-storage hydro project lies to the North, in the shadow of the village.

The irony for Kirkconnel and Kelloholm is that a community built on energy resources and located in close proximity to so many renewable developments is not benefitting sufficiently from this investment. Local households and businesses remain exposed to energy market conditions

driving the cost-of-living crisis. Community benefit payments over the lifetime of local windfarm developments are estimated to bring in close to **£16m** to the area, not an insignificant amount, but this is dwarfed by the level of total investment surrounding the village.

The opportunity therefore exists for a reimagining of the relationship between Kirkconnel Parish and local renewables' energy developments. One that sees local businesses and householders benefit from lower energy costs and local residents benefitting from higher paid jobs, whilst at the same time supporting the decarbonisation of Kirkconnel in line with the Scottish Government's ambition to become a Net Zero Nation by 2045. This is the focus of the 'Sustainable Town' theme.





## A Sustainable Town

### **Theme 1, Priority 1: Develop transformative green energy solutions for local benefit**

This priority will explore new solutions to the way businesses and households in Kirkconnel generate, receive, use and store energy, resulting in a more sustainable and affordable solution for the community as a whole.

This is a long-term priority for the community, the implementation of which is likely to run through the duration of this 10-year Plan. The resulting benefits of a

successful implementation would be a wholesale transformation of Kirkconnel's relationship with energy for decades to come, transforming the way in which all aspects of the community access, use and store their household and vehicle energy. It has the potential to be the single most important factor to realising the future economic and social transformation of the village.

Supported by SOSE, experienced energy consultants will be engaged to undertake a detailed technical feasibility study in 2023 which will look at the potential for the direct

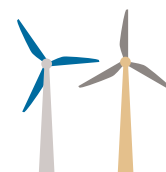


supply of energy from local windfarm(s), explore the potential for localised energy storage solutions, consider options for local green hydrogen production and storage, and explore the options for energy efficiency and renewable options - supported by a digital energy audit - as part of a large retrofit programme.

The feasibility study will link to the delivery of the Borderlands Energy Masterplan and its future programme to support communities and businesses in their ambitions for the implementation of transformative energy solutions.

It will learn from UK exemplars such as Knoydart Renewables' direct supply from hydro and social landlord Pobl's solar and

battery retrofit programme in Swansea. Brown Brothers, supported by SOSE, will be the key local anchor in working with external energy consultants to progress the feasibility. Brown's is already engaged in exploring the installation of solar Photovoltaics (PV) on its south facing roof space and has held initial discussions with local windfarm developers regarding the direct supply of energy from local turbines via a private wire connection. Exploring the potential that this offers for local businesses and households could be a game changer for the community. Progressing it is a priority.



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*“We are surrounded by wind farms, yet people can't afford their bills”.*

*Kirkconnel resident, Community Survey*

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### CASE STUDY:

#### Knoydart Renewables - Direct supply of energy



Knoydart, in the West Highlands is renowned as a stunning wilderness and haven for hill walkers, and wildlife enthusiasts. With a population of around **120**, half of whom live in the main settlement of Inverie, the **17,200** acres Knoydart Estate is managed by the community owned Knoydart Foundation (KF), a registered charity.

Knoydart is not connected to the National Grid and generates all of its own electricity via a **280kW** hydroelectric scheme, with Knoydart Renewables (KR), a subsidiary of the Foundation, becoming the main producer and distributor for the supply of electricity around Inverie Bay via **7** kilometres of **11** kilovolt 3-phase electricity cable, via **85** poles and **14** transformers, leading to the metering/ billing of nearly **90** connected properties and businesses, serving over **120** residents.

Knoydart Renewables Ltd. is now close to completing its Knoydart Energy Security Project, in partnership with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Local Energy Scotland, the Scottish Government and Scottish and Southern Electricity to deliver a long-term financially and environmentally sustainable energy system for the Knoydart community. An investment of **£2,700,000** has been made to secure Inverie Bay's energy supply for another fifty years and to provide the potential of Knoydart Grid electricity to those small communities to the west of Inverie, not currently served. When complete, this project, will guarantee a clean, affordable, reliable entirely green and renewable supply of electricity to drive the economic regeneration of Knoydart.

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*“If it wasn't for Knoydart Renewables, there would probably be just “20 or 30 people living here with tumbleweed blowing down the streets”*

*Frank Atherley, Chair, Knoydart Renewables<sup>2</sup>*

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## Theme 1, Priority 2: Realise the training & employment potential of green energy

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Scotland's transition to a net zero economy means building the workforce required for the new economy.

Kirkconnel finds itself in an advantageous position of being geographically located in proximity to a large number of planned and proposed renewable windfarm developments, as well as in the shadow of the Glenmuckloch pumped-storage hydro project. These have the potential to provide a growing source of good, skilled and well-paid jobs.

Significant job creation will occur during the construction phase of development, however the real long-term opportunity to maximise local benefit lies in realising the training and employment opportunities for local residents at each stage of the renewables supply chain, from scoping/development to construction to operations/maintenance to decommissioning.

Feedback from the Place Plan stakeholder consultation process suggests a lack of local residents employed within the renewables supply chain. Discussions with windfarm developers as part of the stakeholder consultation supports this feedback and it is suggested that a focused local training solution to address this would be welcomed by all developers.

There is increasing recognition of both the need and potential for high-value training and employment opportunities to support the transition to net zero. The National Energy Skills Accelerator (NESA) has been created to accelerate the up-, re- and new-skilling of both the existing and future workforce as the UK's energy transition gathers pace. Similarly, the Energy Skills Partnership (ESP) is the college sector agency in Scotland for energy, engineering, construction and STEM whilst leading on the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan. Aventus Energy opened the Highlands and Island's first Global Wind Organisation (GWO) accredited training facility in mid-2022 in Alness, Ross-shire, offering courses to equip people with the skills needed to work in the wind industry. Similarly, in 2021, Port Training Services launched its Wind Turbine Training Facility in Port of Blyth complete with a full sized, specially modified wind turbine aimed at providing unique, high quality training opportunities to the renewables industry.

Further and complimentary to this are the opportunities related to the decarbonisation of housing stock in Scotland, a key priority for the Scottish Government in its efforts to address the environmental crisis and achieve net zero by 2045. The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) estimates that retrofitting homes in the South of Scotland could sustain up to **2,239** direct jobs within Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders by 2030, rising to **6,690** direct jobs by 2045<sup>3</sup>. It recommends the creation of a



centre of excellence around rural retrofit to accelerate the delivery of training programmes, provide specialist facilities and support the acquisition of accreditations and use of shared apprenticeships.

This priority will look to commission a feasibility study from energy sector experts to explore the potential to deliver practical accredited green energy training at a site(s) in Kirkconnel - both for local residents and visiting learners - dovetailing with classroom-based learning at the new skills

& innovation centre. This would focus not only on wind and hydro based renewables training but also look to scope out the potential for other green energy training including solar installation, insulation, ground/air source heat pumps installation and servicing and hydrogen systems. Initial stakeholder dialogues with Dumfries & Galloway College, SOSE and local windfarm developers suggest that a fuller feasibility study would help to inform the scope and potential that this could bring to the local community.





### CASE STUDY:

#### **Pobl Housing - Transformative Energy Retrofit Project, Penderi, Swansea**



Penderi Energy Project is a flagship scheme involving **644** social housing properties owned by Pobl Homes in Swansea in South Wales benefiting from the installation of state-of-the-art renewable energy generation through retrofitting with solar PV and battery storage technology.

The project, which has been labelled as part of the Homes As Power Stations initiative, was funded by **£3.5m** from the European Union, **£1.5m** from Pobl, and a **£900,000** infrastructure upgrade by Western Power. It will see the community generate as much as **60** per cent of their total electricity requirements, reducing bills and fuel poverty as well as carbon emissions.

The properties are being fitted with individual or communal batteries to harness power generated via linked solar panels, fitted to most homes in the community, so that renewable energy is generated and can be stored for subsequent use. The project will address inequality in energy generation from different roofs by ensuring that all residents benefit from the energy generated by the community regardless of individual location.

Initial benefits noted by tenants indicate a **50** percent reduction in electricity costs<sup>4</sup>. The project will also provide significant community benefit through targeted training and employment opportunities throughout the life of the project. The contractor will utilise local skills for the project wherever possible and, in particular, is looking to recruit Solar PV and battery storage installers.

Finally, the Penderi community will also benefit from large scale infrastructure upgrades, due to Western Power Distribution using this project as its national pilot to trial the positive effects on the local grid infrastructure of renewable energy supplies and storage.

4 Cost of living: Swansea estate cuts bills by generating energy - BBC News



# A Vibrant Town

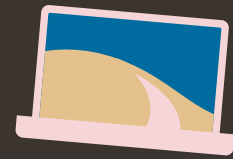


## Theme 2 - A Vibrant Town

**Strategic Objective:** Create a diversified, sustainable and growing economy that delivers new jobs, learning and training opportunities for all, increasing economic participation and benefits across the community.

Kirkconnel has long-standing issues with deprivation and poverty, with substantially more people on out-of-work benefits, low incomes and lower levels of skills. All areas in Kirkconnel consistently fall within the **20%** most deprived communities in Scotland. Unemployment is higher and the number of working aged people on Universal Credit in Kirkconnel is significantly higher than in Dumfries and Galloway, with significant problems relating to income and employment deprivation present.

Economic activity is underpinned by the presence of one of the region's largest employers, Brown's Food Group, which continues to invest and grow. Browns offer a range of employment opportunities for local residents, with job vacancies available at most times. Despite this, the economically active population remains less than in the region as a whole, a long-standing legacy from the decline in local mining.





Economic growth in Kirkconnel is dwindling. In 2021, workplace-based employment was **770**, having declined by **14.4%** from 900 in 2015, compared to a **3.5%** decline for Dumfries and Galloway within the same period.

The people of Kirkconnel are also worse off than their neighbours. Median household income in 2022 was **£20,686**, substantially lower than **£29,671** in Dumfries and Galloway and **£33,095** in Scotland.

Kirkconnel also has lower educational attainment levels, with double the number of working aged people with no qualifications compared to Scotland in 2020.

With unemployment levels higher than in D&G, economic growth declining, income levels lower and **70%** of all employment

within Kirkconnel being centred within manufacturing industries, diversifying the local economy through the creation of higher skilled jobs is an economic priority.

The Vibrant Town theme aims to address these challenges head-on by progressing two key development priorities. Firstly, by developing and constructing a skills and innovation centre on a derelict site in the centre of Kelloholm to support local residents to develop the skills necessary to meet the needs of existing employers, including Brown Brothers and those of the emerging green economy.

Secondly, to undertake a detailed feasibility study to identify suitable locations for the development of new workshop and small business space, addressing a key barrier to new local business growth.





## A Vibrant Town

### Theme 2, Priority 1: Construct and develop a new, skills, learning & innovation centre

Development of a proposed skills and innovation centre has been led by Kirkconnel and Kelloholm Development Trust in conjunction with D&G Council and SOSE. Detailed feasibility, business planning and design work is ongoing and will be complete in early 2023. If these support progression of the project, then it is scheduled to move to technical design - RIBA Stage 4 - by mid-2023 with construction mooted to commence by

2024. Funders committed to the project include Regeneration Capital Grant Funds (RCGF) via the Scottish Government and South of Scotland Enterprise, with capital development costs projected at **£5,000,000** @ November 2022.

The centre will provide high quality, modern business and training facilities at the heart of the local community and will include a modern digital learning environment, commercial kitchen training facilities, office, meeting and breakout space within the one facility. It will house a dedicated employability service to link local residents



with employment opportunities and provide training and wraparound support to address local barriers to employment.

It will look to harness the growth plans of local employers and local renewables projects to create sustainable and inclusive economic opportunities that are accessible for local people, support existing and new local businesses to grow and develop, enable local people to access learning and training at a local level and support new business start-ups and social enterprise creation.

No such facility exists in the local area. Many local residents are prohibited from accessing quality learning and development opportunities outside of Kirkconnel due to travel and financial constraints. Development of the facility will be central to providing equality of opportunity for all within the community and will be a key asset to help facilitate local economic growth.



*“We have so many talented young people with so many skills that we are losing from the village”.*

**Community Survey Respondent**

## **Theme 2, Priority 2: Develop small workshop and industrial units**

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This priority will look to develop new Class 4 (Business), Class 5 (General Industrial) and Class 6 (Storage or Distribution) premises within the village.

As a rural economy with dispersed, small centres of population, Upper Nithsdale is constrained by poor infrastructure and remoteness from markets. Over time, difficulty in creating a critical mass of economic activity and investment has led to a lack of supply of modern business premises and the increasing obsolescence of existing stock.

This downward spiral needs to be addressed. Investing in new industrial space will create the conditions for new business innovation, the growth of indigenous businesses and new business start-up, diversifying the economic base of the community. The D&GC Local Development Plan has identified new business and industrial land adjacent to Greystone Avenue in the village to accommodate new opportunities.

This priority is currently at an aspiration / idea stage and will require feasibility funding to work with local landowners - Buccleuch Estates, Brown Brothers, D&GC, and others - to explore suitable sites for development - Greystone Avenue or other - and prepare a business case for investment via Borderlands. The feasibility study is proposed to be carried out in 2023.



# A Welcoming Town



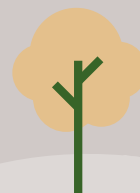
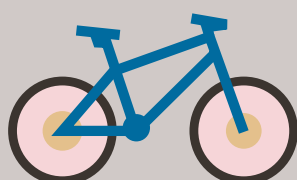
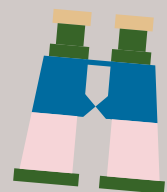
## Theme 3 - A Welcoming Town



**Strategic Objective:** Increase the number of visitors visiting, staying and spending in Kirkconnel by developing and enhancing the local visitor infrastructure, paths, natural assets and events.

The appearance of the area is important to the community. Civic pride runs through the work of the many local groups, all designed to make Kirkconnel and Kelloholm a welcoming place for both residents and visitors. The village invests its human and monetary capital in its upkeep and maintenance, reflected in a Gold Award and Best Small Village 2019 at the Beautiful Scotland Awards 2019.

Whilst the people are the beating heart of the community, offering a warm welcome to all, the appeal of Kirkconnel and Kelloholm as a place to live and a visitor destination is undermined by the quality of public realm and lack of local infrastructure. Improving the heart of the village is an immediate priority for the community and centres on undertaking a main street & public realm improvement programme allied to a plan to address derelict land and premises for community benefit.







Increasing the numbers of visitors that stay and spend in the area is both an opportunity and a challenge. It is widely accepted that the visitor potential of the area remains underdeveloped with a lack of historic investment and development in tourism promotion.

The area is rich in industrial and cultural heritage and benefits from favourable transport links. Local heritage assets include historic sites related to the Covenanters, the Old St Conal's Church yard, a memorial for local poet Alexander Anderson and a small 'heritage museum' on the main street which offers the chance to explore the area's agricultural and mining past.

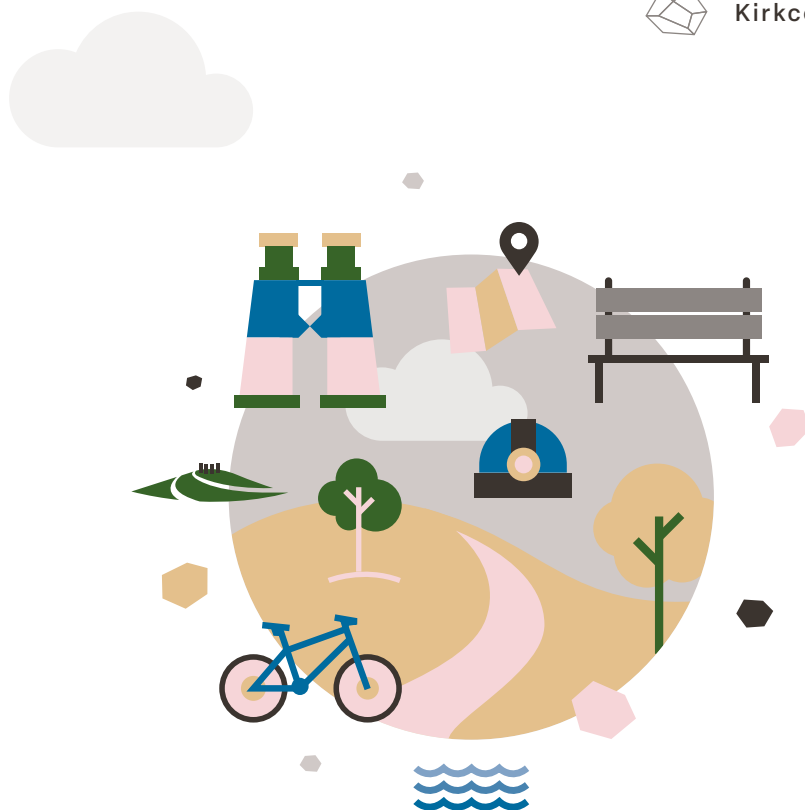
The opening of Crawick Multiverse in 2015 provides an inspiring outdoor visitor attraction with the ambition to become the south of Scotland's leading outdoor events venue. Its "weird and wonderful" uniqueness and appeal has been recognised by Lonely Planet in its annual list of Best in Travel **30** top regions to visit in 2023<sup>5</sup>.

Learning from the example of Cruachan Visitor Centre in Argyll, Buccleuch Estates has indicated an interest in examining the potential to create a visitor centre and visitor experience on the Glenmuckloch pumped-storage hydro site upon completion of the works, providing a further opportunity to generate substantial additional day visitors to the local area to discover the role which hydro power plays in meeting the nation's electricity demands.

The untapped tourism potential for Upper Nithsdale is there for all to see. Realising it will require development of a multi-strand visitor strategy that considers all aspects - infrastructure, events, marketing, supply chain opportunities, strategic investment. Only by prioritising, resourcing and implementing it will the potential for tourism to become a further catalyst for the wider rural economic development of the area then be realised.



5 <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/southern-scotland-seven-day-itinerary>



## A Welcoming Town

### Theme 3, Priority 1: Public realm regeneration programme

This priority is centred around the community led wish to undertake a main street and public realm improvement programme allied to a plan to address derelict land and premises for community benefit. The rationale for this is the local belief that the village, as a place to live and as a visitor destination, is undermined by the current condition of public realm and unused buildings and space.

The Place Plan community survey found that **26%** of respondents prioritised a main street and public realm regeneration programme whilst **36%** prioritised the need to develop a strategy to address derelict land and premises and maintain open space for community benefit.

This priority will aim to improve the heart of the village by bringing forward a package of measures including the ownership and refurbishment/repurposing of derelict buildings, public realm signage, and identifying new solutions to the challenges of derelict space, all designed to improve



the look and feel of the area. Progressing these measures will also support, align with and underpin the more focused measures to be brought forward within the visitor strategy.

To progress this priority, feasibility work will be undertaken in 2023 to identify the ownership and condition of derelict land, buildings and public realm with a view to agreeing a prioritised costed action plan for improvement, supported by Borderlands Place Plan funding.

### **Theme 3, Priority 2: Develop an Upper Nithsdale visitor strategy**

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Developing a visitor strategy for Upper Nithsdale will require a strategic coordinated response. This will include members of the Upper Nithsdale Tourism Partnership as well as other key partners and agencies including, but not limited to, Crawick Multiverse, Buccleuch Estates, KKDT, local businesses and accommodation providers as well as liaison with SOSE and D&G Council.

With funding to develop the strategy and follow-on feasibility work for associated capital works, the opportunity exists to refresh and extend the scope and focus for the Partnership to create a long-term strategy with clear, agreed objectives and an associated action plan that can be suitably resourced and progressed, with the aim of increasing tourism numbers and spend in the local area.

The strategy will be multi-dimensional in its scope in order to deliver a cohesive and integrated set of measures that will support both the growth of standalone local assets, such as Crawick and the proposed Glenmuckloch visitor centre, as well as delivering wider benefits for local businesses and service providers within the community.

There is a clear need and requirement to invest in quality, modern infrastructure and associated services to attract and welcome those who wish to come and stay, be that campers or those bringing their caravan or motor homes. This lack of visitor facilities




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*“The biggest opportunity for the Kirkconnel and Kelloholm area in the next 10 years is tourism-based industries, including Cycling and Walking”.*

**Community Survey Respondent**

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was a key finding of research undertaken by the University of Strathclyde in 2018<sup>6</sup>.

The research also noted that a lack of co-operation between local visitor stakeholders and insufficient marketing promotion had resulted in low numbers, and a highly seasonal pattern, of visitor trips to the area.

The strategy should also consider thematic focus areas such as green & active tourism, heritage tourism and outdoor events; the development of visitor services, such

as food service and accommodation; the need to improve local routes and pathways to improve the local walking and cycling experience; the potential offered by digitisation and virtual reality to enhance the tourist experience; as well as developing local supply chain opportunities.

Development of the visitor strategy is suggested to start in 2023 with a follow-on feasibility study for suggested capital developments, supported by Borderlands Place Plan funding, proposed for 2024.



6 'Upper Nithsdale and North Lowther Accommodation and Tourist Attractions - Research Project'. University of Strathclyde Business School MSc Marketing students, 2018.



### CASE STUDY:

#### Cruachan Visitor Centre, Argyll, Scotland - Sustainable Tourism



Cruachan Power Station in Argyll is a model for renewable and low-carbon energy production and a pioneer in sustainable tourism. Lying deep within Ben Cruachan on the shores of Loch Awe, the power station opened in October 1965 as the first reversible pumped-storage hydro system on this scale to be built in the world. Operated by the Drax Group, the site features the very successful Hollow Mountain visitor centre and tourism experience.

The Visitor Centre lies tucked off the roadside, at the outflow to Loch Awe, occupying a modern building containing a museum which shows the story of Cruachan with visitors able to learn how electricity can be quickly generated using the power of water through free interactive educational exhibitions. Visitors can also take a guided tour by special bus into the cavernous machine



hall a kilometre inside the solid rock of Ben Cruachan to hear the story of the power station from its initial construction to its current role generating on demand electricity for Scotland. Drax also offer free guided tours at the Hollow Mountain for schools and higher education institutions during term time as part of its commitment to promote science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects and careers. The Visitor Centre also houses a cafe and gift shop providing light refreshments and souvenirs.


VisitScotland has named Drax's Hollow Mountain Visitor Centre as one of its top visitor attractions, citing the outstanding experience and customer service. The Centre receives around **50,000** visitors per annum and was awarded the Gold Award for Green Tourism in 2019.



# A Wellbeing Town



## Theme 4 - A Wellbeing Town

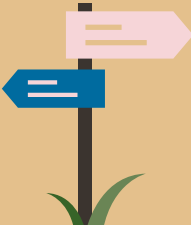






**Strategic Objective:** Develop new delivery models to enhance and improve the access to, and the range of, community health & recreational facilities and services.

The residents of Kirkconnel Parish have limited access to leisure, recreation, social and cultural opportunities and services due to rurality, transport infrastructure, timetabling, and journey costs.

This is set against a backdrop where local health indicators show a higher number of expected deaths for the area, a higher number of individuals receiving contributions for chronic disability, higher than expected emergency stays in hospital and over a quarter of residents being prescribed drugs for anxiety, depression or psychosis.

Due to these factors, the health, leisure and wellbeing facilities on offer within the area take on even greater importance and significance to people's lives. Ensuring they continue to evolve, develop and remain relevant to the needs of the community is essential.





Hillview Leisure Centre plays a key role in the community however it needs upgrading and modernisation. Thirty-six percent of community survey responses prioritised the need to improve community leisure and sport amenities and infrastructure. With public sector budgets increasingly under pressure, the opportunity exists to explore new models for service delivery.

Community ownership and/or management could open new sources of finance to make Hillview fit for future purpose. Working in conjunction with Mill Hill Health Centre and community partners, this could see delivery of a holistic approach to physical and mental wellbeing through increased participation in health and fitness activities,

integration with local health and welfare services and other wraparound services such as childcare provision as part of an integrated community well-being agenda. This approach would support the community survey findings, with **35%** of respondents indicating a priority to work with local health centres to pilot new solutions such as social prescribing. Carrying out detailed feasibility work to explore this approach is a priority.

Local services must also develop and meet the needs of a changing population. With Kirkconnel and Kelloholm having a higher percentage of the population aged **16-24** than the Dumfries & Galloway and Scottish averages, having access to modern and



Hillview Leisure Centre



relevant facilities is increasingly important for young people in the community. The Place Plan consultation engaged with two Youth Groups that operate in Kelloholm on a Friday night. The thirty-nine young people identified a clear need and desire to see new and upgraded indoor and outdoor recreation and play space in the village - skate park, pump track, trampolining - with provision for year-round use.

An integrated approach to health and wellbeing needs to consider the quality and affordability of food. Food prices are rising at their fastest rate for **45** years, hitting **16.2%** in the year to October'22<sup>7</sup>.

KKDT has worked with local partners to develop a range of local food sharing initiatives to tackle food poverty, support health and well-being and combat isolation and loneliness within the community. Further local responses are merited, with **16%** of community survey respondents wanting to create opportunities for local food growing. The Place Plan has therefore prioritised developing a local food growing plan focused around conjoining the local allotments with the exploration of vertical container farming solutions to provide year-round, low carbon, high-yield and affordable fresh produce.



Kello Rovers Football Club

7 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-63641414>







## A Wellbeing Town

### **Theme 4, Priority 1: Develop a new delivery model for community-led health, wellbeing and recreation services**

This priority recognises the importance that health, recreational and wellbeing facilities have within the local community to address social and health deprivation whilst also recognising that current facilities and delivery models are under stress and in need of development to meet future needs.

The Dumfries and Galloway Health and Social Care Partnership Health and

Wellbeing Model recognises the need to provide not only a range of “traditional” health and social care services, but also the need to support people and communities to utilise their own assets and promote resilience to enable them to take an active role in maintaining or improving their own health and wellbeing; working as a system to prevent ill health and to reduce health inequalities.

Working with the Health and Social Care Partnership, this priority will look to employ community development principles to support local residents and community



groups to identify and articulate their health and wellbeing needs, and to take practical, collective action to address them. It will also consider local recreational needs, assets and services and how these can integrate together to deliver a holistic approach to local service provision.

It will be taken forward by a feasibility study in 2024 led by an external healthcare specialist and with participation from key local stakeholders including the Health and Social Care Partnership, D&G Council, Mill Hill Health Centre, and local community groups including Kello Rovers FC.

It will be informed by good practice of community-led approaches to delivering integrated health, recreation and wellbeing services, which are becoming prevalent in Scotland. This may include council owned/ social enterprise run models like Twechar

Healthy Living and Enterprise Centre - see case study overleaf - and range to fully-owned social enterprise models like Kilwinning Sports Club and the success they have had in providing accessible sporting, fitness, leisure and educational facilities and opportunities for the local community which has encouraged more positive, healthy lifestyles.

Such models offer the ability to open new sources of capital funding to upgrade and develop existing local assets like Hillview to make them fit for future purpose, as well as to develop new assets. Set within and delivered as part of a more pluralistic approach to the provision of health, wellbeing and leisure services in Kirkconnel and Kelloholm, they offer a practical yet ambitious solution to improving the health and wellbeing of the residents of Kirkconnel Parish.




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*“It is important to keep the facilities that we have and add to them... with more options for things to do”.*

**Community Survey Respondent**

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### CASE STUDY:

## Twechar Healthy Living and Enterprise Centre, Scotland - Integrated Approach to Health & Wellbeing



Twechar is a former mining and quarrying village located **2** miles south-west of Kilsyth in East Dunbartonshire, outside of Glasgow, with significant datazones within Scotland's worst **15%**. In 2001 Twechar Community Action (TCA) was formed as a Company limited by guarantee with charitable status in response to the closure of the local authority owned local recreation centre.

Since then Twechar Community Action has transformed the centre into the Twechar Healthy Living and Enterprise Centre - a community hub which houses a full-time pharmacy, a satellite GP surgery, café, large sports hall and meeting rooms. From these facilities they, and other partners, deliver a wide range of learning and training, health and well-being activities; cultural, sport and recreational pursuits; a youth club and a dedicated pre-fives facility.

Back in 2005 when a regeneration masterplan was prepared for Twechar, the

refurbished Healthy Living and Enterprise Centre was pinpointed as a spearhead project and symbol of the Council's and residents' aspirations to grow the village and attract and retain a higher proportion of economically active people. Twechar Community Action assumed operational responsibility for the management of the Centre, including securing new tenants and letting accommodation, as well as the development of its facilities and services. Within the Twechar business model, however, ownership of the buildings and land remains with East Dunbartonshire Council – with TCA leasing these instead from the local authority. East Dunbartonshire Council and Twechar Community Action work in partnership to co-design and develop services.

The TCA has continued to work successfully with the local authority on further projects including the Twechar Outdoor Pursuit Centre - a new **£1.6m** project for which Scottish Government RCGF funding has been secured to create a new canal side resource offering activities such as canoeing, kayaking, cycling and walking, and providing a base for new educational training and voluntary opportunities and promoting the wider regeneration of the area.



## Theme 4, Priority 2: Develop a sustainable, local food growing system

This priority looks to a wider and more exploratory range of community health and wellbeing opportunities with the development of a truly sustainable local system of food growing focused around conjoining the **6.9** acres local allotment site at Polmeur Road with the benefits of a Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) vertical farming solution to provide year-round, low carbon, high-yield, fresh and affordable produce for the benefit of local people.

Implementing a vertical farming solution - growing crops indoors on stacked shelves - in Kirkconnel offers benefits for local residents and the planet. It will allow the production of fresh, cost-effective, healthy produce in the heart of the community, **365** days of the year and can help to supplement

outdoor growing. Delivered under a community enterprise business model, it has the potential to generate local employment, profit for community investment - see Crop Cycle case study overleaf - and also offers scope for wider social benefits through collaborative education and volunteering opportunities with participation from local schools and community groups.

Delivery of this priority will be informed by a feasibility study scheduled for 2025 to identify the most suitable CEA system, key local partners and associated costs. It will be informed by both the innovative CEA work being delivered in Wales as part of the social-impact and community focused project called Crop Cycle; the development work into CEA being undertaken by SOSE; and the Innovation Hub for Controlled Environment Agriculture (IHCEA) at the James Hutton Institute's site in Invergowrie near Dundee.



Niviston Road site for housing development by KKDT



### CASE STUDY:

#### Crop Cycle, Wales - Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA)



Controlled Environment Agriculture is a process that combines plant science, engineering and technology to optimise plant growing and plant quality to provide a truly sustainable system of food growing. Crop Cycle is a project led by Social Farms & Garden and funded by the Foundational Economy Challenge Fund in Wales to trial the inclusion of CEA growing systems in community settings as a means of providing sustainable, hyper local, nutritional crops for the benefit of local people.

Crop Cycle introduced CEA into 4 sites in Wales and involves the introduction of vertical farms, using large 'shipping' containers, which take up less space than traditional agriculture and allow for crops to be grown completely indoors. By having farms within the heart of communities Crop Cycle can shorten the links from farm-to-fork and help reconnect consumers to the food they are eating.

With vertical farms, by growing under completely controlled conditions indoors, the use of harmful pesticides and chemical fertilisers can be avoided. Having complete control over the growing systems means vertical farms can create the optimum conditions for plants so that they grow healthy and nutritious. LEDs are used as they can be brought close to the top of the plant without fear of overheating thus enabling the racking density of the plants to be increased to produce more plants per unit area. At each of their sites the Crop Cycle project also introduced education programmes so that local schools and communities could learn about vertical farms and have the opportunity to help out with the growing.

Evaluation Work on the project in May 21 by the Foundational Economy Challenge Fund established that it had been able to demonstrate the viability of incorporating CEA into community settings with modelling estimates indicating average minimum revenues of **£50,000** and profits of **£16,500** p.a. per site.



Kirkconnel looking toward Kelloholm



# A Centred Town



## Theme 5 - A Centred Town

**Strategic Objective:** Maintain and raise the quality of the physical, built and connected environment to support Kirkconnel to be a better and easier place to live, work, learn and travel to and from.

Housing, transport, flooding and connectivity are all big issues facing the community of Kirkconnel Parish.

The Scottish Government is committed to realising its ambition where residents can meet their day-to-day needs within a 20-minute walk of their home. In rural settings like Kirkconnel and Kelloholm however, connectivity to and from the place remains a challenge. Over a third of households in the Parish area - **37%** - do not have a car or van compared to **22%** in D&G, impacting on the ability of those residents to access education, health, recreation, retail and other services and facilities.

Whilst benefitting from train connectivity to Glasgow and Carlisle, a number of barriers to affordable and accessible travel exist, including mobility access, price inequalities in the rail fare regime and timetabling. The community survey identified a clear need for a strategic approach to improving the local transport infrastructure and services. At the same time of developing this Plan, SWestrans







published its Regional Transport Strategy, Consultation Draft, in September 2022 which clearly states a desire to put in measures to address these issues. The community embraces these proposals and is committed to working with the delivery partners to bring them to reality.

A similar position exists with flooding. Kirkconnel flooded in December 2013 impacting on approximately **50** properties. This represented the first major flood to the town since 1966. A 2016 study for Dumfries & Galloway Council found a total of **93** properties at risk from flooding in Kirkconnel from the River Nith and the Polbower Burn.

The area has been classified as a priority area by Dumfries and Galloway Council and as a Potentially Vulnerable Area by SEPA with the village identified as a specific community for flood risk reduction. In evaluating the flood protection options, the conclusion reached is that the only option to be cost effective in the long term is the property level protection option which will provide property owners and professional partners with practical and cost-effective steps to help lower flood risk, through the use of affordable bespoke products.

With plans and mechanisms in place to address the transport and flooding challenges facing the town, the focus for the priorities within this theme centre on housing.

The majority of housing stock in the area is social housing, provided in the main by the Wheatley Group. Owner occupation levels are significantly below the levels of both the region and Scotland as a whole. As a whole, housing mix challenges exist to fully meet the needs of the elderly, young and single members of the community. Problems of overcrowding and anti-social behaviour further exacerbate the housing challenges, all problematic for sustaining a cohesive local community.

The Centred Town theme aims to address these challenges head-on by progressing two key development priorities. Firstly, developing a community-led local housing strategy to meet the needs of the whole community and address the mismatch in local provision is a key priority. Housing was recognised in the Place Plan Community Survey as the second biggest challenge facing the community, just behind jobs and equal with meeting the local challenge of drugs.

In support of this but seen as a standalone priority, the community has already made significant progress with its plans for new supported accommodation at Niviston Road, Kelloholm, to enable independent living. Delivering on this will be recognisable success for a community-led housing approach and will provide a platform and track record on which to build more ambitious future solutions.



## A Centred Town

### Theme 5, Priority 1: Develop a community-led housing strategy

There is a clear and expressed desire from within the local community to develop a local housing strategy to meet the community's needs and to address the mismatch in local provision that exists today.

When asked to consider what three negative words represented their community, housing was the second highest response in the Place Plan community survey, after drugs. Housing

was also in the top three local priorities for development in the survey, chosen by **50%** of respondents. This resonates with the findings of the Housing Needs and Demands Survey undertaken for the village in 2019 by Dumfries and Galloway Small Communities Housing Trust which found that **27%** of respondents indicated that their current property did not meet their current needs.

Led by South of Scotland Community Housing, with input from specialist independent housing specialists as needed, this priority will see community



representatives work with local social landlords and agencies to build on the 2019 work and develop a local housing strategy for the village. This will commence in 2024 and will include any updates required to the Needs and Demands Survey, planned and proposed social and private housing developments in line with the Strategic Housing Investment Plan, a review and update to the social landlords' individual or Common Allocation Policy related to the village and community led ownership and delivery models.

### **Theme 5, Priority 2: Develop new supported accommodation at Niviston Road, Kelloholm**

Directly aligned with the development of a local housing strategy, KKDT will progress its plans to develop five two-bedroom homes built to Passivhaus standard for new supported accommodation at Niviston Road, Kelloholm, to enable independent living.

With land asset transfer from D&G Council complete, feasibility and costing work concluded, RIBA Stage 3 Developed Design

complete and planning permission secured, KKDT aims to progress the project through RIBA Stages **4-5** over the next two years with the aim of having the development in place by 2025.

A funding commitment from Whiteside Hill Windfarm has been secured for **£100,000** with the main body of funding targeted at the Rural Housing Fund Grant, with Borderlands also targeted as part of the funding mix. This will act as the first step in the community's plans to take ownership of new housing solutions to meet the needs of its residents and will offer momentum to explore further and more ambitious solutions to further this aim.



*“It is important to develop sheltered housing. This would support individuals who need support and promote independence”.*

**Community Survey Respondent**



# 4. Our Community - Past, Present & Future

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## Our History

Kirkconnel - Church of St Conal, is one of the oldest church sites in Southern Scotland with archaeological remains dating to the 9th century and the present foundations of a church dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries.

From early beginnings the church continued through to the 17th century Covenanter movement when the local minister refused to accept the Test Act and the church was closed. When the breach was healed, the old church was in ruins and the present church at the west end of the village was built in 1729.

In 1850 the opening of the railway line between Glasgow and Carlisle brought with it a huge increase in coal mining. It led to the opening of Gateside and then the Bankhead, Drumbuie and Fauldhead Collieries and a brick works, with Kelloholm constructed to serve the mine workers.

By the time the war broke out in 1914 the population had grown from around **500** to around **4,000** in twenty years. Since the closure of the main coal mines in the 1960s however the population has been declining, reaching **2,075** in 2021, a reduction of 170 since 2009.



- 1 Kirkconnel Activity + Resource Centre (Arc)
- 2 Kirkconnel Miners Memorial Hall
- 3 Kirkconnel Resource Base
- 4 Derelict Building Potential Accessible Transport Hub
- 5 The Cabin Kirkconnel
- 6 Childrens' Playground Kirkconnel
- 7 The Foodshare project (Kelloholm)
- 8 Library & D+G Customer Services
- 9 Former Furniture Re- Use project
- 10 Kelloholm Health Centre
- 11 Kelloholm Primary School
- 12 Action For Children
- 13 Hillview Leisure Centre

- 14 Kirkconnel Community Garden
- 15 Kello Rovers Football Club
- 16 Kirkconnel Bowling Club
- 17 Football pitch
- 18 Local Playing Field
- 19 Multi Use Games Area
- 20 Local Playpark
- 21 Brown Brothers Extension (Currently Underway)
- 22 Brown Brothers Food Group
- 23 Future Elderly Housing Development
- 24 Proposed New Skills and Innovation Centre
- 25 Vacant land owned by the Wheatley Group
- 26 Kirkconnel Train Station



## Our Needs & Challenges

The communities are on a major road (A76) and are served by Kirkconnel railway station, which is served by the Glasgow Southwestern Line, providing linkage to both Glasgow, Carlisle and across the South of Scotland. Travel time is 40-50 minutes from Dumfries, Ayr and Kilmarnock. With this said, unsuitable train timetabling and disabled access at the train station means that not all in the community can truly benefit from this connectivity.

The area has seen a significant decline in employment over the last **40** years with the closure of the coal mines. Other main employers have also shut with Century Aluminium in nearby Sanquhar being the main loss in 2003. Contrary to this however, Brown Brothers in Kelloholm has continued to grow to become one of the UK's largest cooked and sliced meat producers. On the flip side, with **70%** of all employment within manufacturing industries, small business

creation and growth remains challenging, with the lack of available small business space a key factor.

The village is served by Kelloholm Primary School which is part of an Integrated Community School cluster with Sanquhar Academy and Sanquhar Primary. Educational attainment for the area remains low, with a significantly higher proportion of people in Kirkconnel and Kelloholm with no qualifications compared to the region as a whole. Nearly half of people aged 16 and over in the area (**49%**) do not have any qualifications which is considerably higher than across Dumfries & Galloway (**33%**) and Scotland (**27%**).

Despite the presence of one of the region's largest and growing employers, the area remains employment and income deprived and faces a number of social and economic challenges.



**Employment:** In 2021, the workplace-based employment total was **770** people<sup>8</sup>, down from **900** in 2015, the majority being employed in Brown's Food Group, which employs over **500** members of staff.



**Unemployment:** **4.9%** of the working aged population of Kirkconnel were claimant count unemployed in 2022, compared to **2.9%** for Dumfries and Galloway and **3.1%** for Scotland. Likewise, **3.7%** of working aged people in Kirkconnel were long-term unemployed in 2022, compared to **2.3%** in Dumfries and Galloway.



**Overall deprivation:** According to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation<sup>9</sup>, all three data zones representing Kirkconnel and Kelloholm are within the **20%** most deprived in Scotland and they

are amongst the most deprived in the Dumfries and Galloway area out of 201 data zones.



**Employment deprivation:** The percentage of people in Kirkconnel and Kelloholm considered employment deprived<sup>10</sup> was **17.4%** in 2020, considerably higher than the average across Dumfries and Galloway (**8.8%**)<sup>8</sup>.



**Income deprivation:** In 2020, the percentage of people considered income deprived<sup>11</sup> was **22.7%**, considerably higher than across the local authority area (**11.5%**)<sup>8</sup>.



**Education:** There is a significantly higher proportion of people in Kirkconnel and Kelloholm with no qualifications (**31%**) in comparison to Dumfries and Galloway (**15%**).

The Place Plan response to these challenges is to propose a range of projects designed to increase local skills and learning opportunities by developing a new skills, learning and innovation centre (Theme 2, Priority 1); realise the training & employment potential of green energy (Theme 1, Priority 2); and develop small workshop and industrial units (Theme 2, Priority 2). Together these will look to increase the skills and employability potential of local residents and support their ability to take up new higher-paid employment opportunities within a diversified local economy driven by the growth of local small businesses, tourism and the wider green economy.

<sup>8</sup> D&G Council, Kirkconnel Place Data 2022

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. (2020). Scottish Government. SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation)

<sup>10</sup> Employment deprived: those who are on the claimant count, those who receive Incapacity Benefit, Employment and Support Allowance or Severe Disablement Allowance, and Universal Credit claimants who are not in employment

<sup>11</sup> Income deprived: a measure of the percentage of the population (adults and their dependents) in receipt of Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance, Job Seekers Allowance, Guaranteed Pension Credits, Child and Working Tax Credits, or Universal Credit (excluding those in the category 'working with no requirements'), or in Tax Credit families on low income.



Housing remains a challenge for many with a clear mismatch between need and supply across the demographic split. Kirkconnel and Kelloholm has a higher proportion of the population living in overcrowded households (**14%**) than Dumfries and Galloway (**7%**).

In Kirkconnel in 2022, **30.7%** of people live in 'Low income older people in smaller semis' communities compared to **7.5%** of people in Dumfries and Galloway. **18.5%** of people in Kirkconnel live in 'Post war estates, limited means' communities compared to **8.3%** of people in D&G. **7.3%** of people live in 'Poorer families, many children, terraced housing' communities in 2022, compared to **1.3%** of people in Dumfries and Galloway<sup>8</sup>.

The Place Plan response to these challenges at a strategic level will be to develop a community-led housing strategy (Theme 5, Priority 1) and, at a practical level, for KKDT to progress the well-developed plans to build five two-bedroom homes for new supported accommodation at Niviston Road, Kelloholm (Theme 5, Priority 2).

The village is served by a range of services and facilities essential to local life. Local retail is provided by a number of small outlets including two Nisa stores in Kelloholm, a Premier store and a Variety store in Kirkconnel and a local pharmacy. The nearest larger retail outlets available to the local community are either in Cumnock or Auchinleck, 15-17 miles away and out of reach for those without access to transport, unless prepared to pay a delivery fee.

A range of indoor community facilities play their part in meeting community needs, These include the Miners Memorial Hall, the scouts hall, army cadet hall, local family centre, library, Kirkconnel resource base, Activity & Resource Centre (ARC), football pitch, play areas, allotments, and the bowling green.

Leisure facilities are centred around the Council owned Hillview Leisure Centre with its indoor hall and outdoor pitches and Kello Rovers FC. Hillview plays a key role in the community, used by individuals and a range of community groups and serving a wide demographic section of the population. Making it fit for purpose to serve an evolving health & wellbeing agenda into the future is a priority. Similarly, Nithside Park, home of Kello Rovers, lacks floodlighting which limits what and when it can be used for.

Mill Hill Health Centre in Kelloholm provides a full range of health visiting, midwifery, district nursing, mental health





and community learning services and the centre is also the base for social work and the housing rent office. The local hospital is Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary in Dumfries (31 miles away).

The local allotment site at Polmeur Road is significant in its size at **6.9** acres but remains under-utilised and under-valued by the community. Bringing the site into productive use for the benefit of the community offers the potential to realise wider health and wellbeing benefits through the production of healthy food, volunteering and social prescribing.

When taken together, Kirkconnel Parish is an area with a number of anchor assets, facilities and services that many towns would readily welcome. Despite this, significant health inequalities and poorer

health outcomes continue to exist and are likely to continue, with COVID having had a significant impact on residents' well-being and the cost-of-living crisis impacting on disposable income. Against this backdrop, service budgets remain under pressure and local assets are in need of upgrading.

The Place Plan response to these challenges is to focus on exploring options for a new delivery model for local health, wellbeing and recreation services (Theme 4, Priority 1) and developing a sustainable, local food growing system (Theme 4, Priority 2). Together they open up the potential for new community-led service delivery models and funding as part of an integrated well-being solution to meet the health, recreational and wellbeing needs of all parts of the community.



Bowling Club



## Headlines from the Community Survey

There were **155** responses received, where **63%** live in the Kirkconnel Parish area, **24%** live and work in the area, **8%** used to live/ work in the area, and **5%** work in the area.

When asked what positive words spring to mind about Kirkconnel and Kelloholm are, the top three answers were **community, friendly** and **scenery**.



When asked what negative words spring to mind about Kirkconnel and Kelloholm, the top three answers were **drugs, unemployment** and **housing**.



When asked what Kirkconnel and Kelloholm's best kept secret is, the top three answers were the **sense of community and community spirit, its people** and **walks**.



When asked what Kirkconnel and Kelloholm's biggest challenge is, the top three answers were **employment, opportunities for young people, and drugs**.



When asked about the biggest opportunity for Kirkconnel and Kelloholm in the next ten years, the top three answers were **employment, opportunities for young people** and the **opportunities offered by Brown Brothers**.



When asked about what is important when looking to the future, the top three answers were **employment, housing** and **opportunities for young people**.



The word clouds are included in Appendix 1.



The people are the heart of the community in Kirkconnel and Kelloholm. However, whilst a warm welcome awaits all, the area has a limited visitor offer. Despite the quality of the natural environment, the heritage story and local anchor assets including Crawick Multiverse, it is well recognised that there is a lack of local infrastructure, accommodation and poor-quality path/trail networks and that these, along with an uncoordinated approach to marketing the local tourism offer, are undermining visitor numbers and expenditure.

When asked to identify local priorities for development, the community survey respondents identified the need to develop and improve routes/paths for walking and cycling as the second highest priority, polling **53%** of replies, placing it above housing.

The appeal of Kirkconnel and Kelloholm as a place to live and visit is also undermined by the quality of public realm. Large areas of poorly defined open space separate neighbourhoods and erode the sense of place. This is also true with vacant and derelict land and buildings within the town centre impacting on residents' pride in the area and affecting visitor perceptions.

Making inroads into these areas is a priority for the community. The Place Plan response is to prioritise the development of an Upper Nithsdale visitor strategy in 2023 with capital feasibility plan in 2024 (Theme 3, Priority 2) and deliver a public realm regeneration programme feasibility study by 2024 (Theme 3, Priority 1).



Kirkconnel Main Street



## Our Opportunity

The realisable opportunities in front of us are multiple, centred around tourism, housing, small business growth and skills and learning. None of these however offer the potential for transformational change as that offered by green energy. The area has been significantly impacted by the decline in coal mining and this informs the legacy issues faced by the town of income, employment and social deprivation. The opportunity comes from a reimagining of the area's relationship with energy - green energy - and how this offers huge potential for a new future for the area, one of investment, direct benefits and high-value employment.

Planned investments in windfarms and the Glenmuckloch pumped-storage hydro project is expected to amount to c. **£1billion** over the next **5** or **6** years - with the potential for hundreds of higher paid and higher skilled jobs to be created during the construction phase, within supply chains and potentially within maintenance and servicing. Maximising the value of this investment to the local community will come from exploring direct energy

supply and storage solutions, green energy training opportunities and community benefit fund payments. In the long-term, this has the potential to directly address local cost-of-energy issues being faced by both local businesses and households as well as supporting the community to decarbonise and move towards net zero.

Realising this potential could be transformational for the area but will require knowledge, expertise and resources. Brown Brothers can bring its capacity and expertise to bear to act as an anchor organisation for the benefit of itself and the wider community, working in tandem with SOSE, D&G Council, local windfarm developers and external consultants.

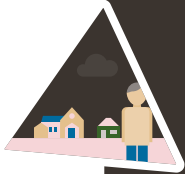
Due to the potential benefit to the community, the Place Plan has identified the development of transformative green energy solutions for local benefit (Theme 1, Priority 1) as the main opportunity and priority for the Borderland Place Plan programme.





## Headlines from the Community Consultation

Complimentary to the community survey that was undertaken, two stakeholder meetings were held to solicit feedback from local public, private and community sector partners. The priorities under each theme that won most support in the stakeholder consultation were:



### **A Vibrant Town:**

Create a local skills, learning & innovation centre (including employability service)



### **A Welcoming Town:**

Develop & improve routes/paths for walking & cycling



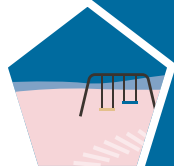
### **A Sustainable Town:**

Develop local infrastructure to support renewable energy initiatives to benefit residents and visitors



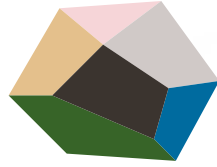
### **A Wellbeing Town:**

Develop outdoor & indoor recreation & play space



### **A Centred Town:**

Develop a strategy to improve local transport infrastructure & services



Glenmuckloch site

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