



Blackness Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MARCH 2023



Falkirk Council



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Blackness Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan

INTRODUCTION

Since October 2022, a team led by Planning Solutions Consulting in partnership with Blue Sail, has been working with Falkirk Council and Historic Environment Scotland (HES) to develop a 5-Year Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan (STID) for the village of Blackness. Funded through VisitScotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF), STIDs are designed to address the pressures faced by communities due to significant increases in visitor numbers.

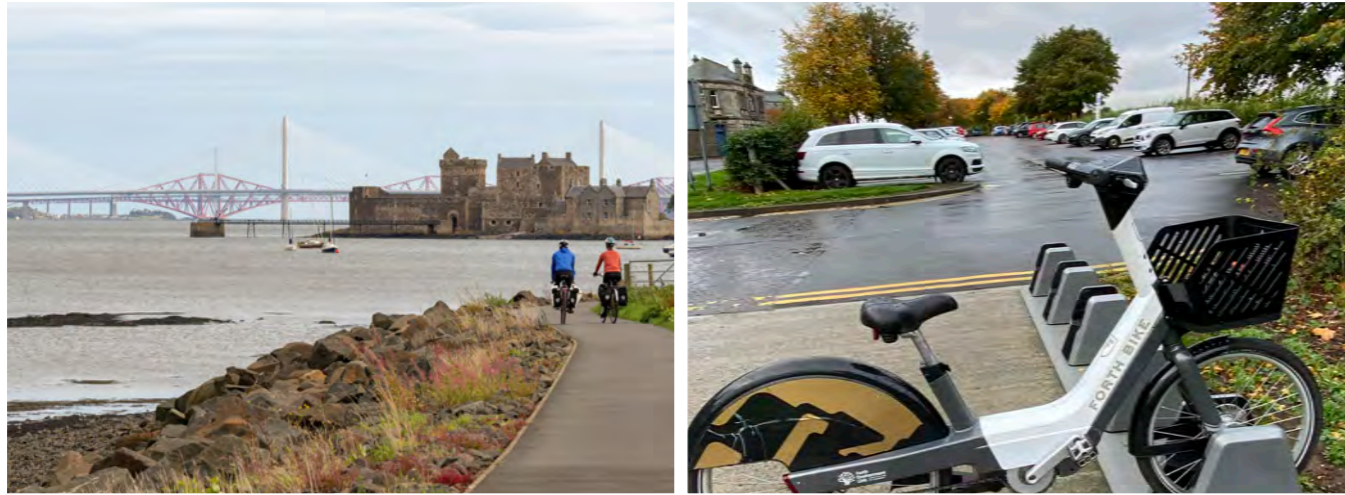
CONSULTATION AND RESEARCH

From extensive consultation, it is clear that Blackness village is facing significant pressures because of the large increase in visitor numbers to Blackness Castle in recent years. Car parking and congestion are particular areas of concern for the community, especially during the summer months and peak days.

Consultation with a range of businesses and organisations has shown that they too recognise the problem and its impact on the village residents. Several consistent key themes have emerged including:

- An acknowledgement that more could be made of the assets on the Blackness Castle site - both to alleviate traffic issues but also to further develop the visitor experience
- Recognition that more could be done to develop the active travel offer and to accommodate visitors with accessibility and mobility issues
- An acceptance that future enhancements to the visitor sector must focus on a responsible approach to growing its value, and
- An understanding of the need for collaboration between a number of stakeholders to help deliver options for visitors

To inform a suitable way forward for Blackness, the team has also identified destinations facing similar problems and reviewed the different approaches they have taken to help manage demand, capacity and visitor flows to alleviate the negative impact on host communities.



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THE VISION FOR BLACKNESS

Blackness will be recognised as a model for a sustainable rural village where its community and visitors are able to fully appreciate its natural setting, unique landscape and historic and cultural significance of a major visitor attraction, Blackness Castle.

The goal is balancing the need to enhance the visitor experience, to support the priorities of the local community and to nurture the sensitive environment with appropriate infrastructure investment.

Collaboration and communication between public agencies, local businesses and the Blackness community will underpin the delivery of this vision and development plan.

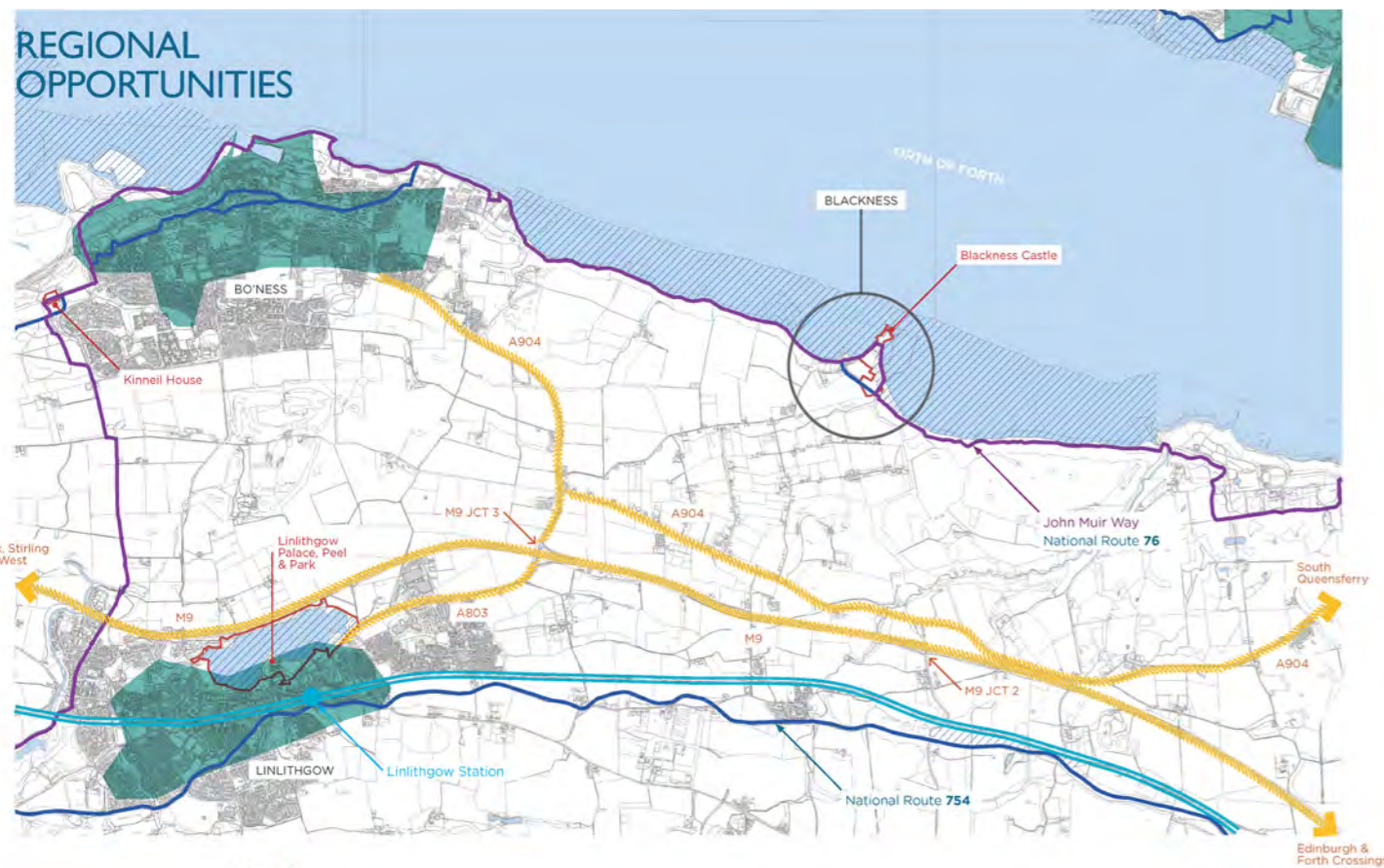
The following principles underpin the vision:

- Retaining the character and distinctiveness of Blackness
- Managing the impact of visitors on the host community and environment
- Effectively managing capacity at peak times
- Enhancing the visitor offer in a responsible way, particularly increasing enjoyment and understanding about the area's outstanding natural landscape, nature and heritage and land/coast/marine management processes
- Ensuring the tourism offer is inclusive and accessible
- Spreading visitors across the area and through the year along with increasing spend within the local economy
- Supporting transition to a low carbon and net zero economy, with a particular emphasis on promoting active travel

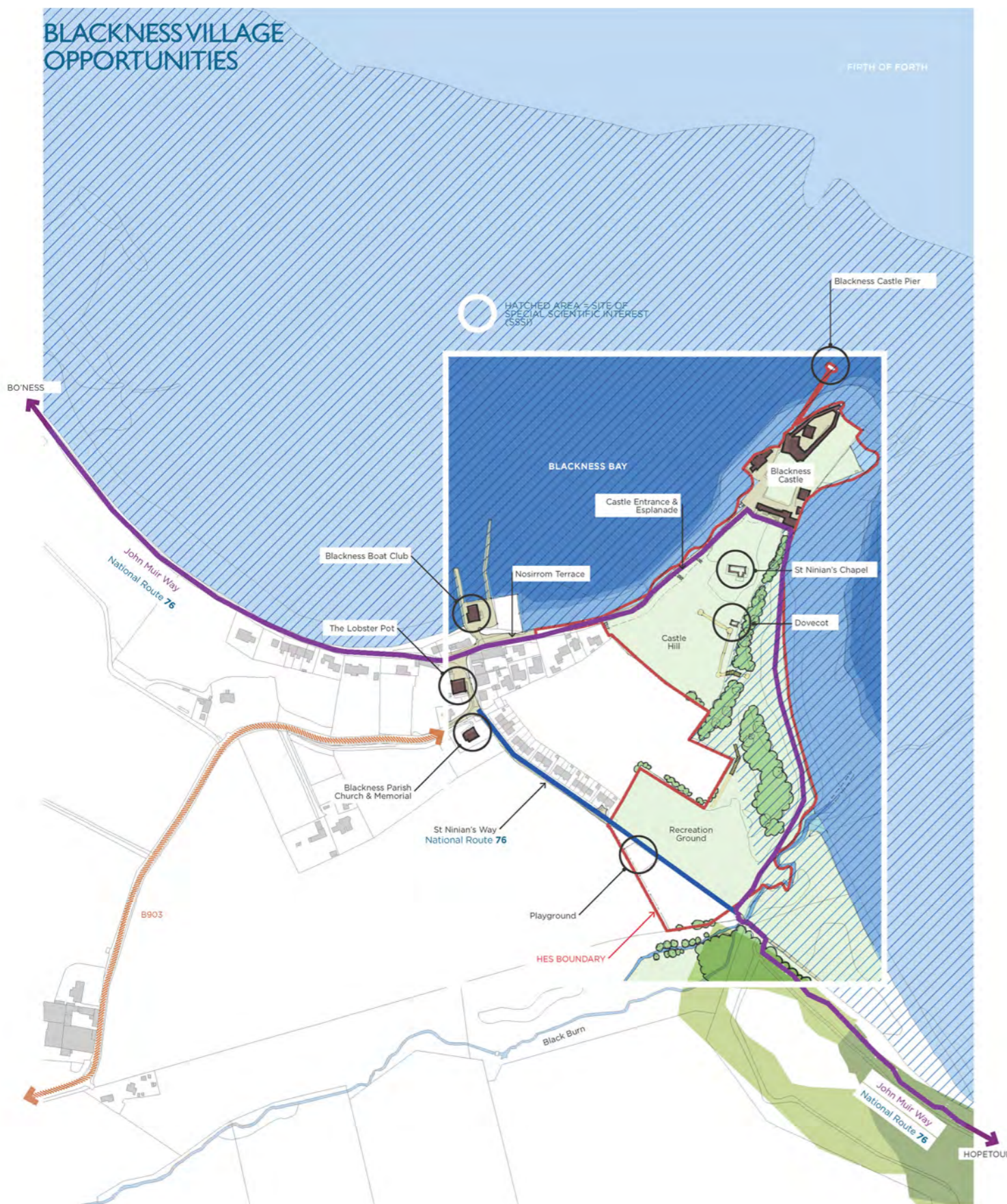
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To address these themes four Strategic Priorities have been agreed by partners and the local community. They are:

- A Increase and promote active travel choices, including the provision of infrastructure improvements that encourage sustainable planet-friendly travel
- B Secure better traffic management and achieve safer vehicle parking for residents and visitors
- C Enhance the distinctiveness and attractiveness of Blackness in a responsible way
- D Encourage Community Participation



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THE ACTION PLAN

The strategic priorities listed above frame the resulting Action Plan and have several programmes and projects sitting underneath each of them - all generated via engagement and discussion with key stakeholders and the local community. Each specific action is designed to have a significant beneficial impact on the sustainable growth of Blackness and has been developed with four key principles in mind:

- Deliverability
- Sustainability
- Collaborative
- Evidence based

PRIORITY PROJECTS

Of the 23 identified actions detailed in the action plan, the following five are viewed as being of the highest priority:

- Explore the feasibility of a **Responsible Travel Hub**, including dedicated vehicle parking for visitors to the village and castle, to determine an appropriate location, scale and format and assess potential impacts for future delivery and operation
- Enhance **Public Transport** provision to the village including supporting initiatives such as actively promoting Blackness Castle as a 'Good Journey' site
- Increase **Active Travel Choices** and connections including extension of ebike infrastructure along the John Muir Way
- Assess options and processes, including possible Community Asset Transfer, to retain the **Public Toilet in Blackness village** and secure its long-term viability
- Progress a HES **Strategic Development Plan for Blackness Castle** within the context of this wider Blackness strategy
- Develop a supporting framework for communication and collaboration between local stakeholders such as the establishment of a **Blackness Community Tourism Group**

NEXT STEPS

1. Celebrate and promote the launch of the Blackness Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan
2. Gather interest, assemble support and identify a structure to establish a Blackness Community Tourism Group
3. Submit a collaborative 2-stage funding application for the Responsible Travel Hub with Vehicle Parking

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