



Doune

For local policymakers

Author: UNIABDN team

Introduction

Doune castle attracts large numbers of visitors, who create congestion problems for the small, picturesque village of Doune rather than bringing economic advantage. The University of Aberdeen through the EU-funded SPOT cultural tourism project carried out surveys of residents, businesses and visitors during 2021, talked to key stakeholders and fed back the results of the research for public consultation. Now in 2022, a Knowledge Exchange project will be carried out in order to develop the impact of the research. The research took into account the current situation of cultural tourism, and below we suggest a number of improvements based on the findings.

Doune Castle, adjacent to **Doune village**, attracts large numbers of tourists due to its popularity as a setting for popular films. In 2019 these numbered around 153,000 per year. The use of Doune castle for the film “*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*” some thirty years ago and more recently for the “*Outlander*” TV series have helped to rapidly increase the number of visitors, especially international ones.

However, the village of Doune itself has only just over 2000 residents and limited facilities for visitors in terms of restaurants, cafes and overnight accommodation. The large numbers of visitors arrive mainly by car, coach or minibus and clog up the narrow local roads. The limited car parking next to the castle means that visitors



park in residential areas and many houses nearby display a “No Parking” sign. **Parking was identified as one of the main nuisances** in our survey in 2021.

The village of Doune and its surroundings does not necessarily benefit from this large number of tourists because visitors tend to drive to the castle and then away again without visiting the village. **Historic Environment Scotland (HES)** as curators of the castle have been slow to recognize this, but have recently liaised more actively with the local community and created a network of footpaths around the castle, including one linking the castle with the town. These footpaths are much used and much appreciated by local people and visitors alike. More recently HES have erected information boards along the footpaths to increase their attraction to locals and outsiders.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** led to a massive reduction in visitors and the various lockdowns resulted in some of the few hotels, guest houses and restaurants closing, sometimes permanently. There is one sit in café, a takeaway café and locals point to the many historic attractions of the village that might be interesting to visitors. The Visitor Centre, staffed by volunteers also hosts a heritage centre with information of interest to cultural tourists. There are also other shops that would benefit from more visitors, but the area lacks a coherent business vision and working Business Association.

There is a vibrant and active **Community Council**, an engaged group of citizens, as well as a Development Trust through which action can be channelled and which provide a contact point for any developments. Residents have a strong sense of place identity and are passionate about their village.

1. Evidence and Analysis

At present HES are in the process of signposting the various footpaths and providing visitor information boards. However, the **main path is not wheelchair/pram accessible** and only two Boards had been erected to date.

There are plans **to open a car park** in the village on a piece of derelict land, although this would not provide the coach parking that would bring higher visitor numbers and there would need to be a safe connection between this area and the village for people leaving their cars.

The people of Doune are keen to retain the quiet residential character of the village, even if they would appreciate more economic benefits from visitors. It is important **to keep the quality of the tourist offering high**.

The **poor Wi-Fi** connections in the village inhibit the use of digital communications and information spread.

The people of Doune would like to see **more connections between the castle, the village and surrounding areas** including Kilmadock Cemetery, Deanston distillery and the village

There is an active Community Council and Kilmadock Development Trust and a community development officer has been appointed at the end of 2021.

A public toilet has been built but at the time of writing had not yet opened.

Traffic and Transport policies are decided elsewhere in the region and are outside of the control of the local community. Doune lies on the intersection of the highways between Callendar, Stirling and Dunblane which results in a lot of through traffic further congesting the streets. Public transport has been cut back with only occasional busses so that most visitors have to resort to road transport, as do locals.

At the level of the Scottish government as well as the EU, **green, sustainable tourism is being encouraged**. This means providing opportunities for walking and cycling in ways that harmonise with the natural environment.

2. Policy Implications and Recommendations

There need to be **better connections** made between Doune Castle and Doune village. The footpath and signage are good first steps but there needs to be a clearer trail leading visitors from the castle into the village and past the local shops and eateries. Likewise, there needs to be more connection for visitors between Doune Castle and the surrounding areas such as Deanston. The media tourism that brings people to the castle could thereby be expanded to include other kinds of cultural tourism.

We are proposing that in addition to the notice boards, there could be a digital trail with QR codes outside local businesses and on significant buildings. The information would be linked to the Community Council website and therefore could be regularly updated. They could be situated in such a way as to promote local businesses. For those without digital connections, a heritage trail leaflet would also be produced and made available at the Visitor Centre or local restaurants and hotels. This would draw upon local knowledge to engage the community with visitors.



FIGURE 1: AERIAL FOOTAGE OF DOUNE CASTLE IN PERTHSHIRE, SCOTLAND.

Author: Dr Stephanie Garrison



The **traffic and transport policies** need to be reconsidered to provide access to Doune by car, minibus and coach but also on foot or by bike. The public transport network needs to take into account the connectivity of the different areas around Doune. The needs of disabled visitors and those with child carriers should be taken into account. The car park needs to be developed but also footpaths from the car park through the town. Ideas about a bypass or banning heavy vehicles from the main High Street have been considered in the past and should perhaps be revisited. A bike path is being constructed and improved, which will bring more sustainable “green” tourism to the town and will connect with regional cycle paths. Plans should ensure that this connects with the village and its businesses.

More **accommodation and eating options** should be provided, including ones that are open in the evening. This could be facilitated with the help of a more active Business Association.

In order to ensure that any expansion is in keeping with the **unique historic atmosphere of the village**, local residents need to be consulted and any plans made should ensure that their quality of life is preserved. This may mean rationing coach and car parking to ensure that this small and picturesque village with its many footpaths and walkways is not overwhelmed by visitors and by traffic and that the quality of the offering remains high.

Cultural tourism can provide **off-season tourism** as well as **summer visitors**, so opening hours in winter could also be considered along with a package of offerings in the winter months.

The **COVID pandemic measures** for booking visits to the castle has helped to better calibrate the number of visitors arriving at one time. HES are considering continuing this policy in future and this might help to relieve congestion.

The provision of **better Wi-Fi facilities** would be a priority for both residents and visitors. BT Openreach and the Scottish Government offer attractive opportunities for rural areas to develop this. This would enable more digitization of tourism to better control tourist and information flows as well as benefit local business.



Project Identity

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