

Climate Action Strathaven

Report into the challenges of encouraging active travel within and around Strathaven

January 2024

Introduction

Strathaven has a thriving town centre with a range of local shops and restaurants with a medieval market square at Common Green and is located around six miles south of Hamilton, close to the Avon Water tributary of the River Clyde. There is one High School and three Primary Schools, a leisure centre, various sports clubs and a golf club. The Strathaven area has many walkways, woodlands and greenery including a large public park and Strathaven Castle.

Climate Action Strathaven is committed to improving transport links in a sustainable way that delivers a change in behaviour that will help mitigate the worst aspects of climate change and bring about a more sustainable transport model reducing the use of fossil fuels and encouraging shared ownership.

Transport Scotland has been developing a transport strategy covering the next 20 years. It says: “Our [National Transport Strategy](#) (NTS) sets out our vision for Scotland’s transport system for the next 20 years. The vision is underpinned by four interconnected priorities: Reduces Inequalities, Takes Climate Action, Helps Deliver Inclusive Economic Growth and Improves our Health and Wellbeing. The Strategy signals the future direction of transport and provides the context within which decisions, in and beyond government, continue to be made. The Strategy does not identify or present specific projects, schemes, initiatives or interventions, but sets out the strategic framework within which future decisions on investment will be made. This Strategy is for all of Scotland, recognising the different needs of our cities, towns, remote and rural areas and islands. It considers why we travel and how those trips are made, by walking, wheeling, cycling, and travelling by bus, train, ferry, car, lorry and aeroplane. We all need to work together across boundaries to add value and ensure its success, involving all people in our society in decision making and empowering businesses and communities to play a vital part in the delivery process. We all also need to take responsibility for our actions, ensuring that our travel choices make a positive contribution to delivering the Strategy over the next 20 years. At the heart of the NTS is the recognition that we need to make a step-change in behaviour and provide attractive, affordable, accessible and sustainable travel options.”

Issues

Avondale covers Strathaven, Glassford, Sandford, Drumclog, Gilmourton and Chapelton. It has a population of around 12,000 and is largely rural, although there are links along the A71 to the M74 and Ayrshire, the A726 to Hamilton and the A723 to East Kilbride. It has poor public transport links although historically this was not the case as it had bus routes to Ayrshire, and at one time had two railway stations, plus a station in Glassford, providing links across Central Scotland. There is great potential to improve links and also to build on

an excellent network of cycle routes, although there are many issues in bringing these improvements about.

1. **Population growth.** Over the years Strathaven has expanded in all directions with new developments on the Glassford road, A723, A71, Newton Road and Lesmahagow Road. This has increased the population without any review of traffic movements within and outwith Strathaven.
2. **Parking.** There is limited parking within the town. The Common Green is an ongoing issue as it is largely unsuitable for the mix of pedestrians, cyclists, cars, HGV vehicles, etc. There is regular congestion and the maximum parking time available is 3 hours. There is no provision for cycle parking.
3. **Cycle/pedestrian provision.** There is a good network of country roads around the town, there is limited provision made for cyclists and pedestrians. Parking is also limited and with narrow roads in the town centre, this results in bottlenecks and congestion at peak times, causing issues for pedestrians and cyclists. There is poor driver behaviour with limited use of indicators and also issues with pavement parking.
4. **Visitors.** Strathaven remains a popular destination for visitors and with a number of events and festivals held throughout the year there can be issues with managing visitor numbers. With limited public transport to and from Strathaven this results in a significant number of private vehicles coming to the town resulting in parking problems and issues for residents. For example the Strathaven Balloon Festival regularly attracts over 40,000 people over the weekend of the event to a town with a population of 8-9,000. The introduction of park and ride has helped alleviate congestion but it still remains a challenge to support as there is a desire by some visitors to park as close to the event as possible.
5. **20mph.** A pilot 20mph scheme was introduced in Strathaven Town Centre in 2021. The Scottish Government is currently reviewing its policy on 20mph schemes and we await the outcome to see whether there is the opportunity to extend the scheme across other areas of Strathaven. Kirk Street is a particular concern as it is a major road with pedestrian access to the town centre from all properties from Todhill Road and Station Road requiring to cross it. There are concerns about speeding on several roads in Strathaven including Glasgow Road, Threestanes Road and the Muirkirk Road. There was a 20mph scheme through Maybole on the A77 prior to the construction of a bypass. It appears unfeasible to build a bypass around Strathaven due to the level of building on the former railway line heading to Stonehouse.
6. **Emissions.** There are concerns about air quality in Strathaven town Centre caused by the level of vehicular movements and congestion caused by standing traffic. There is frequently gridlock, especially in the Common Green, Wellbrae and Bridge Street.
7. **Location.** Strathaven sits on the A71 which is a major thoroughfare between Edinburgh and the Ayrshire coast. It also sits on the A723 to East Kilbride and the A726 to Hamilton. This results in traffic leaving the M74 and traffic from Canderside Toll heading to Ayrshire and also East Kilbride using Strathaven as an easy route avoiding the Raith Interchange. There are regular instances of 40 tonner using Strathaven's streets to navigate through. There are also issues with heavy goods vehicles using car satnavs that result in them being stuck in the Common Green.

8. **Commuting.** Strathaven is a commuter town with significant numbers leaving each morning to head to Glasgow, Hamilton, East Kilbride and other destinations. There is the reverse issue in the evening.
9. **EV Charging.** There are currently around twelve EV Charging points in Strathaven plus private charging points at individual residences. The drive towards the end of new diesel and petrol cars from 2030 (or 2035 depending on where you live) will require an expansion into access to EV charging points.
10. **Public Transport.** Strathaven is not well served by public transport with only three services.
 - ☐ The 256/13 service between Hamilton and East Kilbride serving Glassford and Chapelton along with several stops in Strathaven Town Centre. The service operates at most once an hour.
 - ☐ The 254 service between Hamilton and East Kilbride serving Stonehouse. Again this is at best an hourly service.
 - ☐ The Climate Action Strathaven 3C service from Strathaven to Glasgow serving Stonehouse. There are twelve services each way a day starting at 7am with the last service from Glasgow leaving at 9.15pm.
 - ☐ In addition there is Avondale Community Bus which is a registered charity and supports access to Strathaven from local villages.
 - ☐ There is no public transport from estates off Lesmahagow Road or out on the A71. There is also no public transport for residents of properties up Lethame Road and Colinhill Road. This results in residents in these areas bringing their cars into the town centre causing congestion and problems with parking.
 - ☐ Strathaven formerly had two railway stations, one in the town centre and the other in Flemington. The rail network was extended to Larkhall several years ago and there is an ongoing study into options for introducing a rail line to Stonehouse and on to Lesmahagow. However there are no plans at this time to investigate an extension to Strathaven.
 - ☐ Access to taxis in Avondale is limited creating issues for people travelling between villages in the area for social/family events without the need to use cars.

Challenges

1. **Lack of an integrated transport network.** An integrated transport network enables passengers and users to plan journeys across multiple methods of travel with minimal delays and waiting times. Countries across Europe do this so much better than Scotland and this failure limits confidence and desire to use public transport. As an example the 256 bus from Strathaven does not link to any trains from Hamilton Railway Station into Glasgow without a waiting time. There is no effective way to get from Strathaven to Lanark or elsewhere in Lanarkshire in a reliable way.
2. **Local Government policies and priorities.** With budget cuts and increased focus on service charges there may be concerns that there will be no commitment or funding to support changes that would bring improvements to the transport network and traffic arrangements in Strathaven. The focus of the transport sub-group involving SLC and Strathaven and Glassford Community Council has been on ideas that could be implemented at minimal cost. There are also concerns about the focus on 'three injury incidents' before changes are considered. The proposal to implement a one

way system at Wellbrae, Castle Street and Common Green resulted in a discussion on how to improve the junction at Castle Street/Bridge Street/Kirk Street and the indication was that bringing in an Active Travel solution accommodating cyclists and pedestrians would be financially challenging. Required changes to accommodate active travel may be difficult to implement due to ongoing financial challenges facing local authorities as they try to deliver core services. It may be a challenge to get SLC to buy into changes that would improve the transport network around Strathaven due to potential costs and ongoing budget constraints.

3. **Scottish Government policies, priorities and procedures.** All governments express a desire to implement policies to manage climate change, but all are driven by the electoral cycle and perceptions of what policies bring success at elections. This creates an environment where policies are proposed but not implemented in a realistic timescale, if at all.
4. **Lack of take-up of electric vehicles** due to concerns about range, recharging times, access to EV points, delays to journeys caused by recharging times.
5. **Restrictions on local ability to develop ideas and solutions.** This can be either financial ability to implement local solutions due to lack of funding or through intransigence at all levels of government to support initiatives. Despite obvious issues with the road network and traffic levels within Avondale, there is little organisations can do independently to implement change.
6. **Lack of lanes on M8 for vehicles of multiple occupancy despite Scottish Government commitment.** As a charity we have the opportunity to link up with other public transport operators to push for this to be implemented. There should be a policy to encourage use of vehicles for multiple occupancy (buses, cars, minibuses) through access to special lanes and although this was a manifesto promise at the last Scottish Election, with a commitment to implement, no progress has been made to date.
7. **Kick back at Westminster on transport policies including pushing back the end of petrol/diesel cars.** There was a commitment to end the sale of new petrol/diesel cars in 2030 at Westminster. However this commitment was changed to 2035 after the Uxbridge by-election, when there was seen as being a voter reaction to the extension of the ULEZ in London.
8. **Lack of support for public transport.** As part of the drive to introduce Low Emission Zones (Lez) in our cities, there was a commitment of £500m to support the extension of public transport. To date less than £30m has been spent and applications into the fund appear to be currently suspended.
9. **Potential moves to create an integrated and centrally run bus service removing independent services such as the 3C.** There is some evidence that publicly owned and centrally managed bus services in, for example, Edinburgh and Manchester, provide a better and coordinated public transport network. This has led to the instigation of a review into public transport and an assessment of whether there are better options for provision. Although this has the potential to bring a marked improvement into both the efficiency and the scale of public transport, it may restrict the potential for organisations such as CAS introducing local transport solutions such as the 3C and community buses.

Opportunities

Despite the issues and challenges, there are opportunities as well. Since its creation CAS has been seen as providing innovative solutions in many areas including transport. It has successfully introduced a regular bus service to and from Glasgow, has introduced an effective e-bike hire scheme and is also developing its Car Club to expand the access to hire vehicles across Avondale.

1. **Scottish Transport Bill.** This bill was passed in November 2019. Its aims were

- ☐ to allow councils to create low-emission zones
- ☐ help councils improve local bus services
- ☐ encourage 'smart' ticketing – flexible and electronic tickets – which can connect different services
- ☐ outlaw parking on pavements and double parking
- ☐ improve the regulation of road works
- ☐ increase the size of the Scottish Canals board

The bill provided greater flexibility to introduce local bus services, however there is no evidence this has taken place. As a climate charity we should be working with others to highlight the potential and to encourage implementation of better transport solutions. With the reduction in local authority budgets it is likely that organisation such as ours will be in a key position to bring about change in this sector and to encourage, for example, the introduction of community bus services serving Strathaven and surrounding villages. An example appeared on Morning Live recently, highlighting the success of a community bus service in Kinross in Perthshire. We have the potential to work closely with Community Transport Association to investigate options for new local community services that serve our villages and the new housing developments on the edge of Strathaven, thus reducing the number of car journeys into Strathaven town centre.

2. **Review into the rail network from Larkhall.** The introduction of a station in Larkhall with a line through Hamilton to Glasgow and beyond has been an undoubted success. There is a review underway to assess the feasibility of extending this to Stonehouse and also Lesmahagow. There are challenges given construction on what was previously the line from Larkhall Station, and the issue of the two viaducts. However there is the potential if those issues are overcome to look at options to include Strathaven in any proposed extension to the rail network. In the past there has also been talk of the idea of a light rail line to East Kilbride. We need to ensure that Strathaven is included in any proposed extension to the rail network and that our voice is heard.
3. **Mobile and Scrappage Fund.** There was a twelve month pilot of this scheme from February 2023 by Transport Scotland to try to encourage a move away from polluting vehicles, especially with the planned introduction of LEZs in our major cities. This type of scheme can be beneficial in encouraging change, but needs to be extended and more widely available if it is to be a success. With electric vehicles still being more expensive than their petrol/diesel counterparts and no clear second hand market
4. **Access to Electric vehicles and electric bikes.** Ranges are increasing all the time as is battery technology. There is an increase in access to charging points and Apps

available that show locations clearly. Increased provision of EV Charging points will encourage take up of electric vehicles, as is an awareness of how regular journeys and longer journeys are supported..

5. **Expansion of the cycle network around Strathaven.** There is an excellent network of cycle routes around Avondale. There is also an increase in the number of rural businesses that operate on these routes and there is the potential to both encourage increased levels of cycling and use of local businesses. Clear signposting is needed as well as effective local maps that highlight safe routes.
6. **Community bus network across Avondale.** Avondale Community Bus has been operating in and around Strathaven for well over ten years and is a registered charity. It operates a number of services across the community and also makes the minibus available to groups to hire. There is the scope to enhance this by establishing a regular scheduled community bus network serving villages and outlying estates in Strathaven.
7. **Network of Transport providers and CTA.** We are not alone in the desire to see change implemented by governments at all levels. We also clearly have a voice and a presence having successfully implemented a number of initiatives over the last few years. We can liaise with other public transport providers and community organisations on action towards implementation of lanes for vehicles of multiple occupancy and other key transport priorities.
8. **Car Club.** Car Club has already been a success with the first car and we now have a second car to hire out to the community. Increase in the number of vehicles available from the Car Club can only help deliver the message about the opportunities it provides to reduce vehicle numbers whilst ensuring access to a vehicle as required.
9. **Traffic review.** Strathaven and Glassford Community Council has held regular meetings with SLC on traffic and transport in Strathaven. This has had some success in several areas around the town and led to a proposal about a one way system for Strathaven town centre that was the subject of a recent hearing by a Reporter for the Scottish Government, There is the potential for this to be built on as it is unique to Strathaven and Glassford, however it has always been made clear that any proposals for change must be cost effective (i.e not involve use of much money). A holistic review of traffic in Strathaven would be an ideal opportunity to encourage greater access for pedestrians and cyclists. Consider a traffic free Common Green.
10. **Collaborative working.** Working in collaboration with other interested parties and organisations to sidestep government and implement policies at a local level that are then taken up by Governments due to obvious success.

Recommendations

CAS has the opportunity to drive the agenda and encourage behavioural change that can benefit the climate. We have a track record in implementing initiatives and we clearly have a voice as demonstrated by the number of TV shows we have been on and the visits to Strathaven from MPs, MSPs, councillors and other interested parties. We need to use that voice to promote change by our politicians and our community. A key recommendation is to use delivered initiatives as a means of raising awareness of options and perhaps influencing politicians to use our example in setting strategy and policy. We need to be working with like-minded organisations and businesses to deliver a message to governments that there

are effective ways of delivering climate change. IN effect we need to sideline government in order to inform it.

1. **Communications.** Continue to drive the message forward through our website and social media as well as the traditional media including TV, radio and newspapers.
2. **Collaboration.** We need to be working with like-minded organisations and businesses to drive and encourage change and to help push governments into more positive and productive action.
3. **Car Club.** Develop a Car Club strategy to increase access to hire vehicles and encourage the reduction in the ownership and use of private cars. The Car Club is clearly popular so we need to increase access and also increase awareness of the scheme. As we increase vehicle numbers we will need a clear strategy on maintenance, cleaning, promotion, charges, etc as well as storage locations. We will need to consider EV charging points as we increase the number of electric vehicles available to hire.
4. **Information.** Work to develop a map of charging points across our community and to report on incentive schemes, etc through our social media and website.
5. **Cycling.** Work with other local organisation in similar sectors, including the Round Strathaven 50, Breeze Birds, Cycling Clubs, Bike Barn, to create a local cycling map highlighting locations to visit, cafes, etc to encourage access to, and use of, cycling. Work with South Lanarkshire Council to install cycle racks in Strathaven town centre but also in local villages at suitable locations (Chapelton Inn, Glassford Hall, Sandford Hall). Apply for funding to install local cycle repair facilities at those locations. Continue to develop the Bike Repair service, sale of accessories and also the resale of refurbished bikes.
6. **Deliveries.** Encourage the use of the eCargo Bike for delivery of goods from local shops and businesses. This would be on a franchise basis and could potentially reduce traffic volumes.
7. **Community Bus.** Establish a community bus network across Avondale. This would serve all local villages as well as outlying estates within Strathaven on a scheduled basis. It would be promoted on the basis of providing easy and cost effective access to the town centre without the need to use a car for short local journeys. Local public transport needs to be affordable and offer solutions that work for the community.
8. **Traffic Review.** Encourage and participate in a holistic review of traffic, transport, parking and volumes in Strathaven, as well as air quality. This should examine all options including park and ride, greater levels of cycling, traffic free areas (Common Green?) and should involve consultation with local businesses to assess priorities.
9. **Local travel survey.** We should carry out a review locally about travel asking why people travel, average journey times, method of travel, car ownership, views on sustainable travel, public transport, cycling and electric vehicles. This would help inform strategy and future initiatives.
10. **Strategic Options.** Review the success of park and ride at Strathaven Balloon Festival and assess the feasibility of establishing a more permanent solution linked to community buses.

Summary

Climate Action Strathaven has already delivered effective transport solutions through the 3C service, Car Club and e-Bike hire. There is the potential to do much more though and to deliver yet more effective transport solutions through working with others and through innovative local transport projects.

Les Hoggan, Trustee, January 2024.